

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

FRANK TOUSEY, PUBLISHER, 168 WEST 23D STREET, NEW YORK.

No. 739.

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 15, 1916.

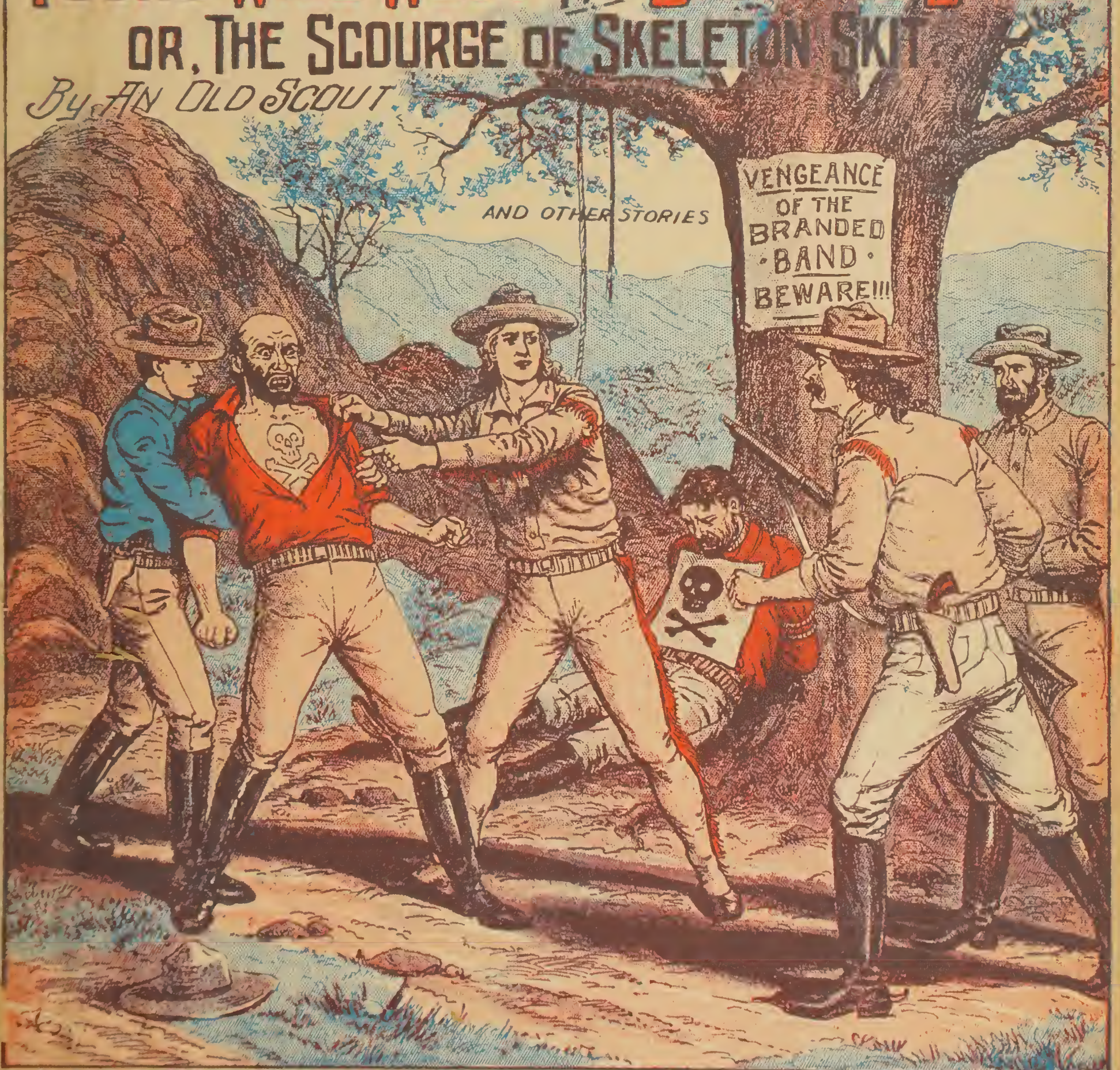
Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST AND THE BRANDED BAND: OR, THE SCOURGE OF SKELETON SKIT

By AN OLD SCOUT

AND OTHER STORIES

VENGEANCE
OF THE
BRANDED
BAND
BEWARE!!!



As Jim seized the man's arms Wild darted forward and tore his shirt open. There was the brand of a skull and cross-bones on his breast! "Here is one of them!" the daring boy cried. "I was certain of it."



WILD WEST WEEKLY

A Magazine Containing Stories, Sketches, Etc., of Western Life

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress, in the year 1916, in the office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C., by Frank Housey, Publisher, 168 West 23d Street, New York
Entered at the New York, N. Y., Post Office as Second-Class Matter.

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Young Wild West and the Branded Band

—OR—

THE SCOURGE OF SKELETON SKIT

By AN OLD SCOUT

CHAPTER I.

SIMON SALTER'S TRICK.

"Say! You fellers all seem to be mighty smart, don't you? I'll jest bet, though, that you ain't as smart as you think you are."

The speaker was a lanky-looking man of any age between thirty and fifty.

He was attired in a serviceable suit of clothes that was at least three sizes too big for him and a narrow-brimmed Derby that was too small for him was perched jauntily on the side of his head, bringing into great prominence a shock of red hair that was almost fiery in hue.

In his left hand was an old-fashioned carpet-bag that had seen better days and his right gripped the handle of a blue cotton umbrella.

A rather strange personage to be found in the saloon of a Colorado mining camp, but such was the case.

He had just arrived with the overland stagecoach, and he had been the first to reach the inside of the "Ripstaver Saloon, Barney Malloy, proprietor."

That is what the sign on the outside of the shanty structure said, anyhow, but it is doubtful if the lanky passenger in the misfit suit took time to read it.

A crowd of miners and rough-looking men started to gey him the instant he alighted from the stagecoach, and that was why he hastened into the saloon.

When they crowded in after him, laughing and joking, he made the remark quoted at the opening of our story.

"So you think we ain't as smart as we think we are, hey?" said a big whispered man in a red shirt and corduroy pants. "Well, boys, that's what I call putty good, now ain't it?"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

"Where did he come from, anyhow?"

"He's got awful thin on ther way here, by ther looks of them clothes."

"Is that thing he's got on his head a hat, or is it a sugar-bowl painted black?"

"Look at ther gripsack!"

"An' he's got a regular circus tent to walk under when he goes out in ther sun to keep his hair from turnin' red."

"Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho!"

Of the many remarks, the last one capped the climax, and the motley crowd of Westerners laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks.

With dropping jaw and naught but astonishment depicted on his face, the new arrival leaned against the rough counter of the saloon and looked at them.

"Well, by gum!" he ejaculated when there came a lull in the laughter.

"Want to git accommodations, stranger?" asked the man behind the counter, who happened to be the proprietor him-

self. "If ye do it is myself that kin give 'em to you, an' at prices that are right, too, begob!"

The proprietor was plainly an Irishman by birth, but he had evidently lived long enough in the West to acquire something of the way English was generally spoken there.

"I do want to git accommodated, by gum!" was the retort. "But before we make a deal, mister, I'd jest like to show these here fellers that they ain't as smart as they think they be."

"Go ahead an' show 'em, begob!"

"All right. Now jest put two glasses on ther bar, mister."

The miners ceased laughing and crowded up close to see what the stranger was up to.

The glasses were produced and the man in the misfit clothes nodded approvingly.

"Now, jest let me have your whisky bottle, mister."

This was placed on the bar and the proprietor became as interested as the rest.

The newly-arrived man then calmly poured out a stiff horn into one of the glasses, and then turning to the men, exclaimed:

"Now, jest watch me close, fur I'm goin' to do somethin' that you never seen done afore, by gum!"

He took the empty glass, and, removing his hat, placed it on top of his head.

Then he put the hat back again, giving them all a good opportunity to see that he left the glass under it.

The interest was growing all the time now, and the peculiarly attired stranger had the floor to himself.

"Now," said he, "as I said afore, I want you to watch me close. You are a smart set, you think, but you ain't goin' to catch me in doin' this. I've got an empty glass under my hat, ain't I?"

"Yes!" came from half a dozen of the men at once.

"Well, here's a glass what's more than half full of liquor, ain't it?"

"Yes! Yes!"

"Well, I'm goin' to put ther liquor under my hat without spillin' a drop! An' I'm goin' to do it without takin' my hat off, or havin' any one to do it fur me!"

The men crowded nearer, some of them looking at him in surprise and others with disgust pictured on their faces.

"You can't do it," said one.

"Yes, I kin, by gum! Jest watch me, now!"

He picked up the glass of whisky and began moving it around his head close to the little derby.

"Keep your eyes open, now, an' you may be able to see how it is done."

Every eye was on the glass.

The performer made two or three mysterious moves with his left hand and then tapped the crown of his hat with the bottom of the glass.

Then all of a sudden he brought the glass down and placed it to his lips.

"There!" he exclaimed. "I told you I could do it!"

Not more than two or three caught onto the trick.

They began to laugh.

One, who didn't see the point, stepped up.

"You drank ther tanglefoot what was in ther glass," he said.

"I know I did, but didn't I put it under my hat when I done, it, you all-fired fool?"

There was a roar of merriment then, for they all saw into the trick.

"I done jest what I told you I'd do," went on the stranger.

"I didn't say I was goin' to put ther liquor in ther glass what's under my hat; I said I was goin' to put ther liquor under my hat, an' I done it. It tasted mighty good, too!"

"You're all right, my friend," said a good-natured looking fellow, patting him on the shoulder. "I won't make fun of you any more."

"He's a regular fool, that's what he is!" spoke up the man who had not seen the point at first. "Now, jest watch me break ther glass what's in his hat!"

Crack!

He whipped out his revolver and sent a bullet through the crown of the derby before any one could interfere.

The stranger put up his hand and took up his hat in a twinkling.

"By gum! You did break ther glass!" he exclaimed. "But you've ruined my best hat. I bought that to go to ther Centennial with, an' I've had it ever since, mister. You've got to pay fur shootin' that hole through it, jest as sure as my name is Simon Salter! Do you hear what I say, mister? You've got to pay fur puttin' that hole through my hat!"

"Shet up!" retorted the miner, who was unquestionably one of the bullying kind. "Shet up, or I'll shoot them clothes of yourn full of holes!"

"By gum!" and the fellow looked around appealingly.

It was just at this moment that three newcomers entered the saloon.

That they were strangers in the mining camp was plainly evident, for every eye was turned on them instantly.

Dressed in fancy hunting suits of buckskin and wearing blue silk shirts, the three made a striking, not to say dashing appearance.

Two of them were boys of twenty or thereabouts and the third was a tall man of perhaps thirty.

The latter wore his hair long and had a heavy, black mustache, and his very appearance indicated that he was a thorough Westerner.

One of the boys was about as handsome a young fellow as could be found anywhere.

There was a fearless look in his dark eyes and the wealth of chestnut hair that hung over his shoulders topped off with a costly sombrero of a pearl color, made his finely molded features look like a picture in a frame.

The other boy was also strikingly handsome, but he did not have such a dashing look on account of his hair being cut close to his head.

All three wore belts containing revolvers and hunting knives and each carried a repeating rifle.

"By gum!" repeated the man with the little derby, and then he shook the broken glass from it.

"What's the trouble, my friend?" asked the dashing-looking young fellow with the long hair.

"That feller jest shot a hole through my hat, an' 'cause I told him he had to pay fur it, he says he'll shoot my clothes full of holes."

"Oh! I guess he was only joking with you," and the boy smiled reassuringly.

"What's that you said, youngster?" spoke up the bullying miner, leaning over as though he did not quite catch what was said.

"I said I guessed you were only joking when you said you would shoot his clothes full of holes," answered the boy in a louder tone.

"Oh! You did, hey?"

"Yes, that is the remark I made."

"Well, who told you to make any remarks?"

"No one. I don't have to be told when I say a thing. I always talk when I feel like it."

"Oh!"

There was a pitying expression on the miner's face as he made the exclamation.

He still had his shooter in his hand and his finger was playing with the trigger.

The muzzle of the weapon happened to be pointing straight at the handsome young fellow's feet.

He stepped toward the counter and the muzzle followed him.

Then something happened that almost took the breath away from the men in the saloon.

"Drop that shooter!"

As the words left the lips of the boy his hand held a revolver within six inches of the miner's nose.

There was such a ring in his voice when he uttered the command that it went through all hands like a thrill.

Thud!

The miner's shooter fell to the floor.

He realized instantly that his life hung on a slender thread and he obeyed the command.

"Well, by gum!" ejaculated Simon Salter, as he had called himself.

He was the first to break the silence that followed the sound caused by the revolver when it struck the floor.

"You ain't as smart as you thought you was, are you, mister?" he added.

"Smart?" spoke up the tall man with the flowing hair. "Why, that measly coyote never was very smart, an' I'll bet on it. He's only one of ther harmless kind what make believe they're somebody. He wouldn't hurt a flea, that feller wouldn't."

There was a titter from some of the miners at this.

The fact was that the man was just about as the tall stranger had pictured him.

But he was one of the kind who thought the easiest way out of it was the best, so he simply said:

"You've got ther drop on me, young man. It's all over!"

"Good! Now, give us all a good cigar apiece, landlord," and the boy tossed a twenty-dollar gold piece on the counter.

CHAPTER II.

THE VENGEANCE OF THE BRANDED BAND.

Less than two miles from the mining camp of Skeleton Skit, and not far from the trail that led into it, on the same day that our story opens were gathered a band of eight men.

It was a lonely place right at the end of a blind gorge, which ran under a rocky ledge of sixty feet and made it really a big cave.

On both sides of the gorge there were innumerable smaller caves, some of which were almost entirely obscured from view by tangled vines and dense shrubbery.

Through the center of the declivity ran a small stream of clear water, which undoubtedly came from some spring farther up the mountain-side.

The eight men that were gathered in this lonely, out-of-the-way spot seemed to be perfectly at their ease.

They were seated and reclining on skins that were spread on the rocky ground right at the mouth of the big cave that was the ending of the natural split in the mountain.

If one had taken a good look at it he would have been apt to come to the conclusion that it was a very comfortable camping-ground, since there was ample shelter from storms, good water, fine grazing for horses and an abundance of dry wood to make fires for cooking purposes.

The eight men were conversing very earnestly, and their leader, a medium-sized man of fifty, wearing a scraggy beard, scowled when he said:

"The die is cast, men! There are just nine men who have been branded on their breasts with the skull and cross-bones, and one of them has got to die!"

A murmur of approval went up from the seven listeners. "Andy Small has proved him self a traitor—we all know he is a traitor—and death must come to him in accordance with the obligations we took when we organized the Branded Band."

"That's right, cap," spoke up one of them. "If I ever go back on what I swore to I hope I may be hung and have a placard put on my breast to warn our enemies that we mean business."

"That's right!" exclaimed another. "I always did like Andy, but he's shown himself to be a traitor, an' that means that he's got to die. Here he has gone an' took all the money we had saved up an' skipped out! We must catch him, cap, an' when we do he must be hung an' placarded."

"Certainly we must. Haven't we started in to get all that can be got from the miners of Skeleton Skit? Don't they

call us the Scourge of Skeleton Skit? Ain't we given it out time and again that we are the Branded Band, and that we work right among them when they don't expect it? Haven't we been the luckiest dogs on earth since we started up? And you don't suppose that we are going to let Andy Small spoil everything now, do you?"

"No, no!" came the unanimous retort from the men.

"You say he went out through the underground passage, so that means that he is on foot. We will be able to head him off before he gets to the camp if we don't start out until half an hour from now. But I think we had better settle our business with Andy as soon as possible, so get your horses, boys!"

The men got up, and picking up the skins they had been sitting upon, tossed them into the cave in a pile, and then went to a smaller cave on the right and brought out their horses.

They were a very rough-looking lot as they mounted their steeds, and were armed in a way that indicated that they were quite capable of putting up a dangerous fight if it came to the point.

Down through the gorge they rode and in about three minutes they reached the mountain trail that led into the mining camp in a northerly direction.

The man who led this organized band of law-breakers was known as Dean Dover in Skeleton Skit, while his men simply called him Captain Dean, or Cap.

The Branded Band had certainly been very successful in their operations since they had come to the vicinity of the mining camp.

They all had claims there, and part of their time was spent among the miners and part in their snug retreat in the blind gorge.

They had a way of behaving themselves pretty good when among honest men, and this gave them the chance to lead double lives.

It was Captain Dean himself who had given the mysterious Branded Band—for so the gang was called—the name of the Scourge of Skeleton Skit, and he had spent more than one hour in helping the miners to find the organized band of villains.

Summed up briefly, the miners of Skeleton Skit knew there was a band of men who called themselves the Branded Band, but no one had been able to see any of them.

True, some had seen them, but they were dead.

The villains did their work well, and always got away with the booty they started to get.

The last haul they had made was from a miner who had struck it rich, and the money had been stolen by the number of the band they called Andy Small before it had been divided among them.

Now they were out to wreak a terrible vengeance on the traitor.

Andy Small had been seen to leave the cave by way of a narrow underground passage that led from the back of the cave into a canyon, and to get to the trail he would have to walk around for over five miles.

If he chose to go to Skeleton Skit—which was more than likely, since he had been unable to take his horse with him—they would surely intercept him.

"Well, boys," said Captain Dean, as he headed for a clump of trees not far from the mouth of the gorge, "I suppose we may as well wait for him right here."

"Yes," answered one of them. "This is just as good a place as any. There's a good tree to hang him to right over there."

He pointed out the tree and all hands nodded approvingly.

"Well, boys, dismount, and we will lie behind these bushes and wait," said the captain.

They quickly obeyed, taking a position where they could see down the trail.

They had not been there more than ten minutes when they saw a man approaching on foot.

He was coming at a quick walk, too, and instantly the members of the Branded Band recognized him as the traitor they were looking for.

"That's ther sneakin' galoot, cap," observed one of them.

"Yes," was the reply. "Now, just wait till he gets almost opposite to us. Then we'll take him by surprise."

When the man got near to the gorge he cast an anxious look about him and then took to the shrubbery on the opposite side of the trail.

"He's afraid," said the captain of the Branded Band, smiling in a contemptuous way. "Well, just lay low. He will run right into us in less than a minute, for he's coming straight this way."

This was a fact.

The man who robbed the thieving gang he belonged to was certainly hurrying to his doom.

The eight villains lay low and remained perfectly quiet.

They could hear the footsteps now, and every second they sounded closer.

The concealed men did not draw their weapons.

They had no idea of shooting the traitor; they wanted to take him alive.

The next moment the time arrived for them to proceed.

The ninth man of the band stepped into view and then—

He walked right into the midst of those whom he had decided to leave forever.

They fell upon him so suddenly that he could not draw a weapon, and in less time than it takes to write it he was a prisoner.

"Glad to meet you, Andy," said Captain Dean, sneeringly. "You had an idea you was goin' to git away, didn't you?"

There was no reply, but the face of the traitor had turned pale as death.

"You forgot the oath you took, it seems," went on the leader of the band in an icy tone of voice. "I always believed a great deal in the saying that 'there's honor among thieves,' but I see how wrong I was."

"Go ahead an' fix me!" came the reply from the prisoner. "I ain't goin' to squeal. I got tired of ther gang, an' I thought I'd leave, that's all. I hadn't much money, so I took what I could find. I've got ther death's head branded on my breast, an' I'm sorry I ever had it there, that's all. Go ahead! Let her rip! I'll die as game as any of you fellers will, an' I'll gamble on that."

There was such a ring of defiance in the man's voice that the villains looked at him in admiration.

He was showing his grit, and they could not help liking it.

But never once did they think that he ought to be let go.

The oath they had taken was a horrible and binding one, and Andy Small had taken the same.

He had violated his oath, and in a mean and contemptible way, at that.

He must suffer the consequence.

"Tie his arms and legs good and strong," said the captain.

"All right," was the reply from those who were holding him, and they very quickly did so.

"Now, take him under that tree over there and get a rope over a limb."

The prisoner was dragged to the spot.

He struggled with a desperation that showed that he still believed that life was worth the living, but it was useless.

The men he had sworn to stick to had him hard and fast.

One of them climbed up and put the rope over the limb.

Another formed a noose at the other end, and then Captain Dean stepped forward, and, with his own hands, placed it around the neck of their victim.

"Now, Andy Small, if you've got anything to say before you die, go ahead and say it!" he said.

"All's I've got to say is that I hope you'll all die inside of a week!" was the reply. "Let her go! Ther sooner it's over, ther better."

"Up with him, boys!" cried the captain. "Death to all traitors!"

He stepped back, and with a heave the villains jerked the victim from his feet and sent him to his doom.

They tied the rope to the trunk of a smaller tree and then looked at their leader for further instructions.

"Boys, I guess we forgot something when we started to catch the traitor," he observed.

"What was it, cap?" one of them asked.

"The card to put on his breast."

"That's so."

"We'll go back to camp and fix one up. Then one of you can bring it here and pin it fast to his breast."

"Good enough!"

Leaving the man hanging to the limb, the eight members of the Branded Band mounted their horses and rode back to the mouth of the gorge.

They followed the course of the little brook and soon reached the end of the big fissure in the ridge.

The horses were quickly put away at an order from the captain, and then, going into the large cave, he went to a small packing box that contained several articles that might prove handy, and took from it a square piece of cardboard.

Next he found a small brush and a bottle of ink.

Laying the cardboard on a square table, he set at work and inscribed the following on the card:

VENGEANCE OF THE BRANDED BAND. BEWARE.

"That will be tacked on the tree," said Captain Dean. "Now, I'll fix one for his breast."

Then he drew a fairly good representation of a skull and crossbones and held it up for the members of the band to look at.

"It's all right!" exclaimed the man who had done the most talking. "It looks like ther brands we've got on our breasts."

"That is does," was the reply. "Now, suppose we all bare our breasts and repeat the oath, boys? There's one less of us, and it will be a good idea to impress it on our minds that his fate will be ours if we prove to be traitors."

"Jest ther thing!"

"Good!"

"Sartin we'll take ther oath!"

"We're going to be as true as steel!"

These were some of the cries that went up from the men, and then they quickly tore open their shirts and bared their breasts.

Upon each of them was a skull and crossbones burned into the flesh so it made a livid scar.

The brand would never leave them as long as they lived.

"Now, members of the Branded Band, all together!"

They then repeated a horrible and binding oath, and, as the last words left their lips, joined hands and remained silent for the space of several seconds.

"Good!" exclaimed the captain. "Now, I guess we all feel better. Powell, you take the cards and put them where they belong. When you come back we will divide the money Andy Small tried to get away with."

"All right!" and the man called Powell started on a dog trot up the gorge, the two pieces of cardboard in his hands.

CHAPTER III.

"HERE IS ONE OF THEM!"

Not a man in the crowd refused when the dashing young fellow ordered the saloonkeeper to give all hands a good cigar.

The miners had sized him up pretty well by this time, and they had come to the conclusion that he was one who should be respected.

"Gentlemen, we are strangers here in Skeleton Skit, so I guess we had better introduce ourselves. We stay here a few days, and I always make it a point to be sociable, and so do my partners. I go by the name of Young Wild West, and this gentleman here with the long black hair is Cheyenne Charlie. My other partner is Jim Dart, and, though he is only a boy, like myself, he generally gets where he starts for. All three of us hail from Weston in the Black Hills, and we've come to Skeleton Skit on a little business. Now you know who we are and all about us."

As the dashing boy said this he lighted his cigar and stepped to the door, just as though there had not been the least bit of trouble.

"I'm mighty glad to make ther acquaintance of you an' your pards, Young Wild West!" exclaimed the man behind the counter. "My name is Barney Malloy, an' I'm after runnin' this saloon. I always like to know an honest man, an' them that ain't honest I ain't got no use fur, though there is some of 'em what comes in here putty often, fur all that, begob!"

"I want to shake hands with you fellers," said the miner, who had been disposed to be friendly with the queerly attired tenderfoot, who had called himself Simon Salter.

"All right. Help yourself, my friend," and Young Wild West stepped forward to meet him.

"My name is Rounder, an' they do say that I'm ther best-natured man to be found in Skeleton Skit," went on the miner, as he shook the boy's hand warmly.

"You look it, my friend."

"That's right!" said Cheyenne Charlie, as he gripped the man's hand and then turned him over to Jim Dart. "Rounder is a good name, there's no gittin' around it!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Simon Salter. "That's ther first pun I've heard made since I left Salt Meadow, N. J., which stands fur New Jersey. By gum! But ain't I glad I've struck some

civilized people. When I first got out of ther stagecoach I thought I was goin' to git mobbed. But it's all right now, 'cept that my hat's got a hole clean through ther crown." "What's ther damage, mister?" spoke up the man who had put the bullet through the derby. "I reckon I'll pay fur it. It was all done in fun, but that ain't no reason that I hadn't oughter pay fur it."

There was a merry twinkle in the Jerseyman's eyes as he looked at the big bully.

"Waal, now, seein' it's you, I'll jest call it square if you'll set up ther drinks fur the crowd. There ain't nothin' mean about me, begosh!"

"That's right, begob!" chimed in the proprietor.

"All right," said the bully, forcing a smile. "Barney, give all hands what they want."

He pulled out a greasy bag that was pretty well filled with money and rattled it in his hand.

The drinks were soon disposed of, and then Young Wild West and his two partners walked out in front of the saloon, where their horses were standing.

Their steeds were the finest that could be found in the West, Young Wild West's being a handsome sorrel that he had broken himself.

He called him Spitfire, and he had often stated that no one man possessed enough money to buy him.

It was about two in the afternoon when the stagecoach arrived at Skeleton Skit, and Young Wild West, Cheyenne Charlie, and Jim Dart had come in from the opposite direction but a few minutes later.

The three wealthy young mine owners had journeyed to Skeleton Skit out of curiosity more than anything else.

Young Wild West was one of the sort who could not live without having plenty of adventure.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart were about the same way, and the three being inseparable companions, they traveled together and enjoyed the dangerous situations they got in so often.

Young Wild West had heard that there was an organized band of desperadoes in the vicinity of Skeleton Skit that was making things very unpleasant for the miners who dug out the gold dust and nuggets.

What got him interested the most was that no one had been able to locate the villains, or even get a clew to their whereabouts, though when a robbery was committed the band usually left a card bearing a skull and crossbones to make it known who had done it.

Sometimes the legend, "Vengeance of the Branded Band," would be inscribed on the card, but this was usually when a murder was committed.

Notes had been received by several miners, giving them notice the Scourge of Skeleton Skit would pay them a visit and relieve them of the gold dust they had, and that if they put up a fight the vengeance of the Branded Band would be put upon them.

It was quite an exciting state of affairs, but still the miners worked away on their claims and kept a sharp watch, in hopes of finding who the villains were.

Young Wild West did not say anything to the men in the saloon about the Branded Band.

He hoped to find out all about it without having to be inquisitive.

Simon Salter followed our three friends outside.

He put out his hand and they shook with him.

Then he told them his name, and let it be known that he had journeyed all the way from New Jersey to seek his fortune in the West.

It did not take Wild long to put it down that the man was a very shrewd fellow.

That he wore such an outlandish rig puzzled him somewhat, for Simon Salter was certainly anything but a fool.

"Say," said the Jerseyman, "you oughter come in a little sooner. I done a trick fur ther miners, an' it was a good one, too, begosh!"

"Is that so?" asked our hero. "What was the trick?"

Salter told them how he had put the whisky under his hat without taking it off.

"I see," said Young Wild West. "That is how the big man came to shoot your hat, was it?"

"Yes, that's how. I wouldn't have had that hat shot fur a good deal, either. I've had it so long that I sorter love it, you know."

"I suppose so," spoke up Jim Dart, with a curious smile. "I don't suppose you have got another one with you in that carpet-bag, have you?"

"Oh, I might have if I was to look, I s'pose. But that ain't

ther thing. A feller don't want his hat shot, an' when it comes to shootin' his clothes full of holes, that's goin' a little too far."

"Well, rather. I should say. So you are going to stake out a claim, eh?"

"Yes. I sorter got it in my head that I could come out here an' git rich. I'll be satisfied if I kin make about fifty thousand dollars. I kin live on ther interest of that ther rest of my life, you know."

"Oh, yes! If you don't live too high you can."

Our friends were not a little amused at the man's way of talking.

But they were satisfied that he was putting on considerable.

He kept on a rattling pace until suddenly there came an interruption in the form of a horseman, who came riding up.

The new arrival, who was a likely looking sort of a man with a beard, was evidently a stranger, for he seemed to hesitate before dismounting.

"How are you, gents?" he said, looking at Young Wild West and his companions. "Have you been down ther road lately?"

"No. Why?" answered our hero.

"Well, I passed a man hangin' to a tree a little outside of ther town. He was dead all right, but ther funniest thing about it was that he's got a card on his breast with a skull an' crossbones on it, an' there's another card tacked to ther tree he's hung to which says 'Beware of ther Branded Band,' or somethin' like that. I was kinder surprised when I seen the feller hangin' there, but when I seen ther cards I made up my mind that there was somethin' curious about it."

Wild and his partners became interested at once.

"How far out did you say this was?" Jim Dart asked.

"Not more'n two miles, if it was that," replied the stranger.

Our hero was convinced that the man was telling the truth.

"I am just curious enough to go out there and have a look at the work of the gang that calls itself the Branded Band," said he.

"Well, let's go right away," suggested Charlie.

Young Wild West nodded and walked over to his horse.

He quickly mounted and started to ride off.

"Say!" called ou the man who had informed them of the hanging man. "I'll ride back with you if you ain't got any objections."

"Come on. We haven't any objections."

By this time several of the miners had come out on the stoop of the saloon.

"Ain't goin' to leave us so soon, are you, Young Wild West?" asked Rounder.

"Oh, we will be back in a short time," was the reply.

Wild was really anxious to have a look at what the bearded man had described.

"You didn't see or hear anything that would lead you to believe that there was anyone around when you came upon the hanging man, did you?" he questioned.

"No," was the reply.

"Ther sight of ther poor feller hangin' there dead sorter startled me an' I didn't stay there any longer than to look at ther two cards I told you about."

"You are a stranger around these parts, are you not?" our hero asked.

"Yes. This is ther first time I've ever been to Skeleton Skit. I'm from Denver."

"Goin' to stop here long?" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

"If I can strike a claim that looks like anything I'll settle here fur a while."

He then told them that his name was John Miller, and that he was quite experienced in gold and silver mining.

"I've made two fortunes an' lost 'em both," he said, with a smile. "Now I'm goin' to tackle ther game fur ther third time."

"Well, if you win out this time you want to look out," said Wild. "It isn't every man who gets the third chance, you know."

"Oh, I'll do different this time if luck comes my way, you kin jest bet on that."

They were riding along at a sharp clip now, and had turned a bend in the mountain trail, so the mining camp of Skeleton Skit was no longer in view.

"Whoever it was what hung ther man must be a putty hard lot," observed John Miller.

"Well, by putting up the cards they showed that they wanted it to be known who did it," answered Wild. "I have heard about this Branded Band, and it seems strange to me that no one has been able to get hold of any of them. Miller,

I take it that you are a man who is not afraid of your shadow?"

"I reckon I've got as much grit as ther average man," was the reply, while he looked at Young Wild West in astonishment.

"Well, we will see if we can't get hold of one of the Branded Band, then. I would just like to take one of the gang back to Skeleton Skit with us. It strikes me that they must be around somewhere in the neighborhood of where they hung the man, so be mighty careful and not make too much noise when we get close to the place.

"Well, I reckon we'd better let our horses walk now, then. It ain't so very far from here."

Our three friends had come to the conclusion that Miller was just what he had represented himself to be.

It is hard telling what a stranger might be, but Wild and his partners had met so many of them that they were quite able to pick out the good from the bad now, and almost at the first glance, at that.

A minute or so later they reached a straight part of the trail, and then Young Wild West brought his horse to a halt, and held up his hand for his companions to do likewise.

"What do you think of that?" he exclaimed in a low tone, at the same time pointing ahead.

They had come in sight of the tree that had the body hanging to it, but that was not all they saw!

A rough looking fellow was in the act of lowering the body to the ground.

"That is one of the Branded Band, I'll bet!" said our hero. "Dismount, boys! We'll catch him, just to see whether I am right or not."

Leaving their horses at the side of the trail, they hurried forward on foot, taking to the bushes to keep from being seen.

The man had got the body to the foot of the tree, and was in the act of going through the pockets, when our four friends sprang upon the scene.

As Jim seized the man's arms Wild darted forward and tore his shirt open. There was the brand of a skull and crossbones on his breast!

"Here is one of them!" the daring boy cried. "I was certain of it."

CHAPTER IV.

THE ACCUSED IS ACQUITTED

The member of the Branded Band called Powell lost no time in getting to the tree Andy Small had been hung to.

Before putting the cards up, however, he looked up and down the trail carefully.

He did not want to be caught in any such act as that if he could help it.

He tacked the card containing the warning to the tree, and then looked up at the swaying body of the man who had been hung for going back on his comrades.

"I'll have to let him down if I want to git ther death's head on him right," he muttered. "Well, it won't take long to do it, I reckon."

He went to where the end of the rope was fastened, and lowered the form to the ground.

It so happened that the body struck the ground and leaned against the trunk of the tree when it came down.

The villain showed signs of being just a trifle uneasy, but he plucked up courage and soon had the card across the silent breast.

"Whew!" exclaimed Powell, taking off his hat and disclosing a head that was pretty bald. "That made me sweat, blamed if it didn't. I wonder if ther captain got everything out of Andy's pockets? I reckon it's worth lookin' fur to see, anyhow. There might be some money that he had of his own in some of his other pockets."

He started in to rifle the dead man's pockets, but was rather rudely interrupted, as has been recorded.

Powell was too dazed to make any resistance, and it was not until he heard Young Wild West speak that he fully realized that he had fallen into the hands of enemies.

"I was lookin' through his pockets 'cause he was a chum of mine," he managed to say.

"Ah!" exclaimed Young Wild West. "So that is it? Well, I rather think he was a peculiar sort of a chum. I suppose you had nothing to do with hanging him?"

"No," lied the villain. "I never knowed he was hung till I happened to come along an' see him. Then I let him down

an' started to look through his pockets, as I had a right to, 'cause he was a friend an' partner of mine."

"Did he wear a brand like you have on your breast?"

"Yes."

Young Wild West looked at the man keenly.

"Then he belonged to your gang, did he?"

"No! Neither he nor me belonged to any gang. We was caught by a gang one day about three months ago, an' we was branded on our breasts an' then let go. The fellers what done it to us had no masks, an' they told us if we ever said a word about it we would surely be killed. That's how Andy came to be hung, I s'pose. He must have told it over in Skeleton Skit. I'm a miner over there myself, an' if you don't believe it jest take me there."

As a liar Powell was making quite a success of it.

He thought his questioner would believe what he said.

But he was mistaken.

"My friend," said the dashing-looking boy with the long chestnut hair, looking him straight in the eyes, "I want you to go ahead and do exactly what you came here to do. If you don't I will shoot you dead in your tracks! Do you hear what I say? I will shoot you dead in your tracks! Now, proceed, and don't make any mistake about it."

The villain paled when he heard this command.

He now fully realized that he could not bluff the boy.

"I—I——" he stammered.

"Do as I say!" thundered Young Wild West, covering his heart with his revolver. "Let go of him, Jim. Unless he obeys he will be as dead as that other fellow is inside of two seconds!"

Dart released the prisoner, and then Powell stood still in a hesitating manner.

But only for a moment.

There was death in the tube that was leveled at him with such a steady hand, and he wanted none of it just then.

He walked up to the body and went through the pockets of the clothing upon it.

"There ain't anything on him," he said.

"All right. Now proceed."

"Proceed?"

"Yes. Do what you intended to after you went through the pockets."

Powell shrugged his shoulders.

He saw that he was covered by four revolvers, instead of one, so he walked over to the rope and promptly began hoisting the remains of Andy Small in the air.

When he got the man's body high enough to cause it to swing clear of the ground he made the rope fast.

"There. That's what I was goin' to do," he said.

"All right," said Wild. "Now, Jim, just take his weapons from him."

Dart promptly did so, Powell not offering the least resistance.

"Now get up here!" and he made room for him on his horse.

The villain cast a glance about him as though looking for help from somewhere, and then did as directed.

"I guess there is no one around to help you," said our hero with a smile. "I could tell that by the way you looked just then. There is no use looking for anyone to help you; we have got you hard and fast. You are one of the Branded Band, and we are going to take you to Skeleton Skit with us."

"All right. There is no use in my sayin' any more, then. When you git there with me you'll find that there's plenty what knows me. Then I reckon you'll be mighty glad to let me go."

"Maybe so, and maybe not."

Young Wild West now started his horse along the trail with its double burden.

But the sorrel was a very powerful steed and did not appear to mind the load.

Wild rode along at a pretty fair gait, Cheyenne Charlie keeping at his side and Jim Dart and John Miller following close behind.

When they rode into the mining camp there was quite a stir among the men who gathered about the saloon and the blacksmith shop across the way.

Simon Salter, the man from New Jersey, sat on the stoop of the saloon, puffing away at a big cigar, and near him were the proprietor and Rounder.

"By gum!" ejaculated Simon. "What has happened?"

"Oh! We have got one of the Branded Band, that's all," answered Young Wild West, as he came to a halt.

"Why, it's Powell!" exclaimed Rounder, rising to his feet. "He ain't one of the Branded Band, Young Wild West."

"Oh! Yes he is," was the calm rejoinder. "He's got the brand right on his breast, too."

A dozen or more were on the spot by this time.

They looked at our friends and their prisoner in amazement.

"Powell one of ther gang what calls itself ther Scourge of Skeleton Skit? It can't be!" cried Barney Malloy, putting on his hat and stepping from the stoop.

"I told 'em they made a big mistake," and then the prisoner flashed a look of triumph at our friends.

"And I told you that I hadn't," answered Wild, quietly. "Men, we caught him in the act of robbing the body of a man who had been hanged. He's got the brand of a skull and cross-bones on his breast, and that proves conclusively that he is one of the Branded Band!"

He gave a jerk at the shirt front of the villain as he finished speaking and the hideous emblem of death was disclosed to the view of the miners.

"Whew!" cried several in unison.

Powell turned just a little pale, but he quickly cried out:

"I kin tell you how I got that mark, boys!"

"It's ther same mark that ther gang leaves behind them when they do their dirty work!" declared one of the miners.

"I know it is," retorted the prisoner. "I'll tell you how I got that brand on me. You know Andy Small?"

"Yes!" came from several.

"Well, one day about three months ago a masked gang caught me an' him, an' then they took an' blindfolded us an' took us to some place an' burned ther skull an' cross-bones on each one of our breasts. Then they told us that if we ever told about it to a livin' soul we would be killed when we didn't expect it. Poor Andy Small must have told it to somebody, fur they strung him up. I happened to come along an' find him hangin' to ther tree. I thought I would let him down an' see if there was anything on his person that might be saved to remember him by. Then these fellers jumped onto me all of a sudden an' made me a prisoner. I thought as how they might belong to ther Branded Band themselves, an' I sorter believe it yet."

There was a deep silence as the villain ceased speaking.

Young Wild West saw right away that the majority of his hearers took stock in what the prisoner said.

"Gentlemen," said the boy, casting a sweeping glance at the crowd that had gathered by this time, "if there is anyone here who thinks I am a member of the Branded Band, or any other crowd that has wronged anyone the least bit, let him step forward and say so. Then I will open my shirt front and show that I am not branded."

There was another silence, and then the bully who had shot the hole through Simon Salter's hat stepped out.

"I won't say as how you're one of ther gang what has been named ther Scourge of Skeleton Skit, but I will say that I think you are!" he said.

"Oh, well, that is just the same. Now, gentlemen, I will show you that there is no brand on my breast!"

With these words Young Wild West opened his shirt and exposed his chest to the view of the men.

"I reckon you ain't a member of ther Branded Band. I know you ain't 'cause I've heard too much about you to believe anything like that," spoke Rounder, stepping up. "Boys, anyone as says Young Wild West ain't all right is a liar!"

There was a burst of applause from several of the men in the crowd.

"No one has said so," ventured one of them. "Pike only said as how he believed he was, an' that don't go to say that he is. He kin be mistaken, can't he?"

"Well, he is mistaken."

Rounder had never showed so much earnestness before, and the miners looked at him in surprise.

"Thank you for your backing in this," Wild said to Rounder. "But I am not afraid to stand trial. There isn't a man in the crowd who dares to step out and accuse me of ever doing a wrong thing in my life!"

Another silence came over the crowd and Rounder sneaked softly to the background.

Our friends had dismounted and they had their prisoner standing so they surrounded him.

Cheyenne Charlie did not like the way things were going.

The scout was satisfied that they had caught one of the gang that had been making life miserable for people around that section, and he did not like the way the miners acted.

"If anyone wants to see my breast he's got to come an' tear open my shirt!" he exclaimed. "An I'll jest guarantee that ther measly coyote what does it will git a bullet through

his thick head. I hail from ther Black Hills, I do, an' there ain't a man that ever wore boots what kin make a fool out of me. This here man is one of ther gang that you fellers have been lookin' fur, an' here's some of you what thinks he ain't. You'll do ther right thing by him if you hang him, an' if you'll take my advice you'll do it."

"Ther man has been around here off an' on fur some time, an' we've never seen anything out of him to make us think he was one of a murderin' gang," spoke up one of the miners. "So I think it would be a good idea to give him a trial by jury."

"That's it!" cried two or three in a breath.

It seemed to be the general opinion of the men that the accused should have a trial.

Wild decided to let them have their own way in the matter.

"All right," said he. "I will turn the prisoner over to you. But I want to warn him that if I ever run across him again under any suspicious circumstances he won't need a trial. I will attend to his case."

Barney Malloy was selected to act as the judge in the matter and the men began to hustle around to find a jury.

They soon got twelve men who were willing to serve, and as it happened they were the very ones who favored letting Powell go.

Those who thought he was one of the Branded Band refused to act.

Our friends told their story and the accused told his.

Then the jury retired to debate on it.

They were not gone long when they came back with the verdict that Powell was not guilty.

The acting judge promptly pronounced him a free man, and with a grin of satisfaction the villain walked into the bar-room.

He bought a drink, and then turned to go with the words:

"Now, I reckon I'll go an' git my horse, which them fellers didn't give me time to git when they grabbed me. I'll jest look around fur poor Andy Small's nag, too, an' I'll be back here as soon as possible."

He did not come back until just before dark, however, and when he did come three horsemen were with him.

Wild and his friends were in front of the blacksmith shop when they rode up.

It struck him that there was going to be trouble.

CHAPTER V.

CAPTAIN DEAN FAILS.

When Powell left Skeleton Skit he lost no time in getting back to the headquarters of the Branded Band.

The distance was not more than two miles, so he got there in less than half an hour.

"Where have you been so long?" asked Captain Dean, looking at him in surprise.

"Well, I had to go to ther camp," was the reply.

"Had to go to the camp, did you say? Whotold you to go there?"

"A young feller named Young Wild West," replied Powell.

"What!"

"That's right, cap. I had just lowered ther body of Andy Small down an' had put ther sign on his breast, when out jumps four fellers on me."

The leader of the Branded Band showed great interest.

"Four fellows jumped on you, eh?" he asked. "What did they do to you?"

"One of 'em grabbed me by ther arms, an' then a boy they call Young Wild West, who is ther leader of 'em, tore open my shirt an' showed ther brand on my breast. He said as how he thought I was one of ther gang!"

Captain Dear's face was a study just then.

"That is bad!" he exclaimed. "Go on, Powell, and tell just what happened."

Powell did so, and told it just about as it had taken place.

The leader was puzzled and worried, as well.

"It is all right as far as the regular citizens of Skeleton Skit are concerned," he remarked. "But I don't like the idea of this Young Wild West taking such an interest in us."

"It sorter looks as though they was after us," observed one of the gang. "When Young Wild West said, 'That's one of 'em!' he must have been looking for us."

"That's so, Gene; you seem to know a thing or two," answered the captain.

The villain called Gene smiled satisfactorily.

He was pleased at being complimented by the leader.

"I told 'em I was comin' back to git my horse," said Powell. "I reckon I'll have to go back soon."

"Yes, you will go back, and three of us will go with you. I guess I bear a pretty good reputation in Skeleton Skit."

"I guess you do, cap."

"We will ride back with you, and when we set eyes on Young Wild West and his gang we'll simply say that they are the ones who hung Andy Small."

"That's it, cap!" exclaimed Powell. "That's it, by Jove! Ther miners will believe it, too, an' then I guess Young Wild West's hunt fur us will come to a sudden end. He come here a-purpose to hunt us out, I think. I feel putty sure of that. I'll point 'em out to you, though you'll know 'em ther minute you set eyes on 'em, 'cause three of 'em has got on fancy huntin' suits, which no one else in ther camp has got, an' ther other one looks like an ordinary miner with whiskers on his face."

"All right. We'll just say that we know they are the ones who hung Andy Small, and I will be ready to shoot the minute it is said, too."

"Kin I go with you, cap?" asked Gene.

"Yes," and then he selected two more and they got ready.

But they concluded to wait until near nightfall before they set out, and telling Powell what to say when they got there, in order to explain his long absence, Captain Dean, or Dean Dover, as he was known in the mining camp, led the way out through the gorge to the trail.

The body of the traitor was still hanging from the limb when they passed it, and the leader of the Branded Band gave a nod of satisfaction when he took note of the fact.

"They haven't bothered to come out this way and cut the traitor down," he said.

They rode into Skeleton Skit just as it was getting dark.

However, Powell was able to distinguish the forms of Young Wild West and his two partners, who happened to be standing in front of the blacksmith shop just then.

"There's three of 'em!" he exclaimed. "Ther boy with ther long hair is Young Wild West, cap! You want to look out how you go fur him, as I reckon he's a whole team when he gits started!"

"Just leave that to me," was the reply. "You give it out that us three saw 'em hang Andy Small, and that they fought us off when we tried to stop them. I'll do the rest."

"All right, cap. Jest leave it to me to explain things."

Some of the miners gave a welcoming cheer when they saw Powell coming back.

They now thought for a certainty that he had not lied.

"Hello, boys!" called out the villain, as he came to a halt. "I had some little time in findin' my horse, an' when I did find him he was with these fellers, which you all know putty well. They kin tell you who hung poor Andy Small! They seen ther ones what did it, an' they had a fight with 'em over it, but got drove away to save themselves. It was Young Wild West an' his gang what killed Andy Small!"

"Boys, I'll swear to that, if that young fellow's name is Young Wild West!" spoke up Captain Dean, pointing to our hero.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when our hero sprang forward and pulled him from the back of his horse.

"You lying scoundrel," he cried, "I can easily prove that I never was there until I rode out to have a look at the dead man. I'll wager a thousand dollars that you have the brand of a skull and cross-bones on your breast!"

There was a deathly silence as these startling words rang out.

Wild had seized the villain by the right wrist, and he now gave it a sudden twist, bringing him to his knees in a hurry.

"Miller," he added, turning to the bearded miner, who was standing near, "open this man's shirt."

"No, no," protested Captain Dean. "It is all a mistake. You are not the parties who attacked us. They were all older men than you are."

A smile flitted over the face of Young Wild West.

He said nothing, but he was doing considerable thinking, just the same.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart had drawn their revolvers at the very start, and they were holding them so the muzzles covered the others three members of the Branded Band.

Both were quite satisfied that Wild was right when he said the breast of the man was branded with a skull and cross-bones.

But they were not going to push the matter if he didn't.

They simply waited, knowing well that Wild knew what he was doing.

Our hero let go the man's wrist.

"Be careful," he said warningly. "If you attempt to do any shooting you will be a dead man!"

"I have nothing against you, young fellow," was the reply. "It is all a mistake. I never saw you in my life before. From the description Powell gave of you four fellows, I thought you were the gang. Powell didn't say you were nothing more than boys. Don't have any hard feelings, now."

Captain Dean was talking in that strain for two reasons.

One was that he wanted to gain favor with the miners, and the other was because he had realized that Young Wild West was not one who could be trifled with.

Powell understood, and so did the other two members of the Branded Band.

"I'm sorry, Young Wild West," spoke up the former. "I thought as how you might be ther gang what done it, an' when I told our friend here that there was four of yer, he allowed that you was ther ones."

"All right, Powell," was the retort. "You know what I think of you. Just mind your eye, now! Look out for yourself. That's all I want to say to you."

The villain shrugged his shoulders, and walked away.

He knew he had gone his full limit, and that it was best to let matters rest the way they were for the present.

He was surprised at his captain for being cowed so easily, though.

"Gentlemen," said Young Wild West, as the miners walked off and assembled in groups, "if the man who was hanged by the Scourge of Skeleton Skit was a friend of the majority of you, I should think some of you would go and cut his body down and give it decent burial."

"That's right!" exclaimed one of those who had taken the side of Powell.

"We'll go out there an' do it right away—what do you say?" said Powell, turning to some of the miners.

They assented, so off they went, taking a couple of shovels with them.

Captain Dean went into the saloon, followed by his two companions.

Young Wild West and his partners went in, too, followed by Miller and Simon Salter and several miners.

Wild was quite well satisfied that the man he had tamed was not through with him yet, and he wanted to give him all the satisfaction he desired.

Captain Dean was quite at home in the saloon.

He seemed to be a general favorite with many, though there were some who acted as though they were distrustful of him.

That the man was doing his best to get into the good graces of Young Wild West was plain to all hands.

He had what is called "a good gift of gab," and he was telling funny little things and trying to make himself as pleasant as possible.

Wild took it all in for what it was worth, and Cheyenne Charlie showed signs of being disgusted.

The scout hated hypocrisy, and he was one of the sort who could hardly restrain from making his feelings known.

"I am very sorry, Young Wild West, that I made such a big mistake," said Captain Dean, working his way around until he was at our hero's side. "I would not accuse a man wrongfully for anything. I have a claim here and try to be a pretty fair sort of citizen. I hope you have no hard feelings toward me."

"That's all right," replied Wild. "Let it go at that. I am sure that I shan't bring the subject up again unless I have very good cause to. I believe there are some here who really think that I might belong to the Branded Band, and just to prove that I don't I am going to undertake to run that gang to earth. I promise you that in less than a week there will be no such a gang as the Scourge of Skeleton Skit. It won't be the first time I have undertaken such a task and succeeded."

"Ah, I like to hear you talk that way. You are made of the real stuff, you are. I'll bet you will succeed if anyone could."

"I'll bet you he will, too!" spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

"I suppose you have great faith in him," and the villain turned to the scout.

"Well, I reckon so. I ought to have, anyhow. I've been with Wild on some of ther greatest trips man ever took, an' we've always come out all right. Wild has busted up more gangs of outlaws an' sich like than you could shake a stick at."

"Well, I hope he will succeed in ridding us of the Scourge

of Skeleton Skit," and Captain Dean laid a peculiar stress on the words.

"Oh, ther chances are that you'll be around when ther thing happens," said Charlie. "Then you kin see just how he acts."

"I should like to be around, I assure you."

After a while those who had departed to bury the body of the victim of the Branded Band came back and reported that they had attended to that duty.

Captain Dean did not remain long after that.

"I have struck a spot that I think is going to pan out rich," he said. "I have pitched a camp there, and I would like to have a couple of you fellows go with me, just to help me in case the Branded Band takes a notion to bother me, you know."

"I'll go!"

His three colleagues all spoke at the same time.

They wanted an excuse to get away from the mining camp, since their scheme to down Young Wild West had failed.

Wild knew what was in the wind, and he made up his mind right then and there to follow the villains.

He was just as well satisfied that the four men belonged to the Branded Band as if they had told him so.

But to make it look as though he had no such thoughts as following them, he proposed a game of seven-up, and sat down with Charlie, Jim, and John Miller.

But the quartette of scoundrels had not been gone long when he got up and made for the shed where their horses had been stabled.

Charlie and Jim followed.

They soon had their horses ready, and then mounting, rode off in a roundabout way for the trail.

"We are goin' to find out somethin' between now an' mornin', an' I'll bet on it!" exclaimed Charlie.

"I am of the same opinion," retorted Jim. "I wonder what became of Simon Salter, the Jerseyman? He disappeared from the saloon right away after we all come in."

"It may be that we will run across him," said Wild. "That fellow is not what he makes out to be, anyhow. I shouldn't be surprised if he is a Secret Service man sent out here to capture somebody. He seems to be quite interested in the Branded Band. I noticed that he took everything in with more than ordinary interest."

"Well, if he is after them, we mustn't let him get ahead of us," declared the scout.

CHAPTER VI.

CAPTAIN DEAN TAKES A PRISONER.

It was a pretty dark night, though the stars gave sufficient light for the four members of the Branded Band to see their way along the mountain trail.

The captain had very little to say as he led the way on a rather spirited black mare.

Probably he felt just the least bit ashamed of the way he had acted when he came in contact with Young Wild West.

"What are you goin' to do about it, cap?" asked Powell.

"Do about what?" was the retort.

"Young Wild West."

"Oh, I guess he hasn't a great while to live."

"You're goin' to make arrangements to fix him, then?"

"Yes, if he bothers us."

"He said he was goin' to put an end to ther Scourge of Skeleton Skit in less than a week," spoke up the man called Gene.

"Yes, I know he did. Well, we will see about that. It is he who will be put an end to. In less than that time he will be found dead by his friends, and there will be a card on his breast with the death's head inscribed upon it. I know just what I am talking about when I say this. Just leave it to me. I'll find a way."

"I'll bet you will!" exclaimed the other man. "I guess all ther Young Wild Wests in creation couldn't stop you, cap."

Captain Dean was much pleased at the way his companions talked.

He felt that they had as much confidence in him as ever, and that was surely reassuring.

The four rode on until they were but a short distance from the mouth of the gorge.

Then they suddenly heard the noise made by approaching hoofs.

A party of two or more was coming in the direction of Skeleton Skit.

Their practiced ears told them that at once.

"Boys, we are not given to playing highwayman," said the captain. "But it might be a good idea to get behind that clump of trees and wait till these horsemen come up. If there are not too many of them, it might pay to hold them up. You have your masks with you, I suppose."

"Oh, yes!" came the reply.

"Well, get out of sight, then."

They rode behind the trees and dismounted without any loss of time.

The villains had scarcely done so when three horses came in view.

As luck would have it, they halted right opposite to the spot where the four members of the Branded Band were concealed.

Then Captain Dean and his followers saw that there were two men and a young woman on the backs of the horses.

This was surely surprising to them, as they had not expected to meet any females traveling that way.

"We may as well wait till the wagon gits up," said one of the men, and the hidden villains nodded and looked at each other.

"It's some family on its way to the mines, and they are taking their goods and chattels with them," whispered the leader of the band. "It strikes me that we need a little furniture and the like. Suppose we tackle them when the wagon gets here, boys?"

"Sure!" exclaimed Powell. "We kin do it easy, I reckon."

They could hear the lumbering vehicle coming now, and, remaining perfectly quiet, they waited.

A couple of minutes later a covered wagon, drawn by two big horses, appeared in view.

A middle-aged woman was driving, as they could see, for there was a lantern hanging to the inside of the wagon top.

"I reckon we can't be so very far from Skeleton Skit, Jane," said one of the men. "Accordin' to what they told us over to Black Spur, we oughter fetch it in less than half an hour. We'll keep right on, an' then we kin take a good rest when we git there."

"All right, Bill," was the reply from the woman. "You know best what to do."

"I will be very glad when this journey is at an end," spoke up the young girl in a musical voice that sounded very pleasant on the ears of Captain Dean just then.

"Well, suppose you end the journey right now, then!"

The captain of the Branded Band uttered the words as he stepped in front of the travelers with a leveled revolver.

His three companions also stepped into view, each with a weapon pointed at them.

"What in thunder does this mean?" cried the elder of the two. "Road agents, by ginger! Let 'em have it, Ben!"

Crack! Crack!

Two shots rang out instantly and two of the villains staggered and fell to the ground.

"Put ther horses on a run, Jane!" shouted the old man. "Let 'em have it ag'in, Ben!"

It was all so unexpected that Captain Dean was astounded.

But he lost no time in getting to cover, though, forgetting to answer the fire.

Two more shots rang out and narrowly missed their marks.

Then away went the horses on a gallop, the wagon bounding along so swiftly that it was in danger of being overturned.

Just how it was done none of them knew, but the horse the girl was mounted upon took fright and turned around in the opposite direction, nearly throwing its rider.

The two villains who had escaped being hit were too busy to note this just then.

They were Captain Dean and Powell, Gene and the other fellow being the ones who had been shot.

"Pick 'em up an' light out!" exclaimed the captain.

Both men were wounded pretty badly, but they managed to get them on their horses.

Then they mounted and headed for the gorge.

Just as they turned into it a galloping horse confronted them.

It was the girl.

She had gained control of the steed and was trying to catch up to the ones she was with.

Captain Dean was a very quick-witted villain.

He werved his horse and caught the girl about the waist with his right arm.

She was whisked from the saddle in a twinkling, and with a bound her horse went on.

A scream left the lips of the captured female and then her captor placed a heavy hand over her mouth.

"I guess we got something out of it, after all!" he exclaimed. "Boys, they rather surprised us, but it is not so bad as it might have been."

"It's bad enough," groaned Gene. "I've got a bullet in my shoulder, an' I can't hold out much longer."

"Stick it out till we git to camp," answered Powell, as he got close to the man to aid him.

The other man had a bullet in the thigh, and, though it was very painful, he managed to ride along pretty well.

Captain Dean was elated at the way things had turned out.

He did not stop to think of the consequences.

It never occurred to him that he would be hunted for by the friends of the girl and surely found.

No! Captain Dean really thought it was an impossibility for any one to find him out.

He meant to take the captive girl and hide her in one of the caves.

Then he would proceed to some place near by and go into camp, just as though he really was a prospector.

The villain was very crafty, if nothing else.

He soon reached the headquarters of the band.

The waiting men were on the lookout for them.

"We have got two wounded ones," said the captain. "Take care of them, boys."

Gene and the other man were promptly assisted from their horses by Powell and some of the rest.

Then the villains who had remained at the cave saw that their leader had a captive.

"What does this mean?" one of them asked in great surprise.

"The captain caught a female. She run right into his arms, an' he's goin' to keep her till her friends come along after her," answered Powell.

"Ther dickens! Where did you run across her?"

"She was ridin' right out of ther gorge jest as we turned into it," was the reply.

The villains looked at Powell in astonishment.

"The young lady belongs to a party who were attacked by outlaws," spoke up Captain Dean. "I want you to find a suitable place in one of the caves right away. See that it is a place that can be closed, so that the wild animals cannot get in after her. I want her to be secure while she is in my charge."

There was a laugh at this, and then the men hastened to obey the leader.

It did not take them long to place some blankets into a small, dry cave across the brook, and then Captain Dean carried his burden to it.

The girl had fainted soon after he had clapped his hand over her mouth and she was still unconscious.

"Ain't she dead, cap?" asked one of the men, who was not used to seeing women who had swooned.

"Oh, I guess not," was the retort. "She has only fainted. She'll come to soon enough. All she requires is a little rest and quiet."

He placed her on the blankets that had been put there for the purpose.

"Have you got a way so you can fasten her in here, with plenty of air?" he asked.

"Yes, cap," was the reply. "There's a big slab that fits ther hole putty well, an' a boulder agin that will hold her here, an' no one would ever dream of it bein' a cave."

"Good! Now light a lantern and leave it in here with her, so she can see where she is when she comes to. It might be that she would die of fright if she were to find herself in darkness."

At this juncture the girl moved.

"Oh! You scoundrels!" she exclaimed. "Release me at once!"

"Aha!" exclaimed Captain Dean. "So it is a vixen I caught, is it? Well, well! I am real glad of that. I always said that when I married I wanted a regular Tartar. She will be the means of making me save my money, I think. Oh! my pretty one, don't get alarmed, please. You are in safe hands."

"Safe hands?" echoed the girl. "Release me at once. I will have you understand that I was born and brought up in the West. If you don't stand clear and let me out of this cave I will shoot!"

There was an ominous click.

The fair prisoner had a revolver.

If it had been a man they would have probably opened fire on him to save themselves, but as it was not, they simply did the first thing that came into their heads.

They got out of the little cave in a hurry.

But as they did so the man who had spoken of the slab of stone and the boulder quickly got the former into place over the small entrance.

"Give us a lift with ther boulder!" he exclaimed.

Even the captain lent his assistance.

They were all thinking of the revolver the fair captive had.

The boulder was pushed over and it landed tight against the slab, thus shutting off the girl's escape.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Captain Dean. "When you get ready to make terms we will let you out."

"I will shoot the first one of you who shows himself!" was the spirited rejoinder.

"You will change your mind before many hours," was the answer she got.

"What's ther next move, cap?" asked Powell.

"Oh! We will pitch a sort of camp right over there," was the reply. "The rest of the gang lay low, and if any one comes along I guess we will be able to answer all questions satisfactorily."

"I reckon so, cap."

The two soon make known their intentions to the rest and then led their horses across the brook and to one of the caves that was about a hundred yards further toward the mouth of the gorge.

"Don't show any lights, and if you hear anything lay low unless a fight starts," was the parting injunction of the captain.

"All right," was the reply.

The two tied their horses where they could nibble at the grass and then prepared to make themselves comfortable for the night.

It was just then that Captain Dean began to think over matters.

He realized that he had not done such a smart thing in capturing the girl, after all.

But he did not have much time to think over it just then, for he suddenly heard horsemen coming up the gorge.

"Now, be careful what you say," he cautioned his companion. "Just let me do the most of the talking and you bear me out in what I say."

"All right," was the reply.

The next minute Young Wild West and his two partners rode up!

CHAPTER VII.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE GORGE.

The travelers who had been attacked by the Branded Band got over a hundred yards from the spot before it was noticed that the young lady was missing.

The woman driving the wagon, who was the mother of the girl, was the first to notice it.

"Where is Jennie?" she asked.

The two men instantly drew their horses to a halt.

"Where is she, Bill?" asked the older of the two.

"I don't know, pop. I thought she went on ahead of us when you yelled fur us to git," was the reply.

"No, she didn't!" declared the mother, as she brought the vehicle to a halt. "I thought she was ridin' by ther side of ther wagon, but she ain't, an' that means that she's been catthed by them road agents or thrown from her horse. We've got to find her."

Just then they heard horses coming from the other way.

"More of 'em, mebbe," whispered the son to his father.

"Might be some one who'll give us a lift," was the reply.

A second or two later three horsemen came into view.

"Hello!" called out a voice. "What's the trouble?"

"Trouble enough!" answered the woman. "If you're honest people, you'll help us."

"Well, I guess we'll help you then."

It was Young Wild West that spoke.

He rode up close to the wagon, followed by Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart.

"Our daughter is lost!" went on the woman excitedly.

"Some men with masks on their faces tackled us an' when we run away our daughter didn't come with us."

"Is that so?" asked Wild. "Just tell us about it in a hurry now, and we will do our best to help you."

The young man called Bill soon told just what had occurred.

"It looks as though the scoundrels did catch your daughter," our hero admitted to the mother. "We will go back and see if we can find her. The men who attacked you had masks on, you say?"

"Yes."

"How many of them were there?"

"I didn't see more'n four," said the old man.

"I guess that is just what they numbered. I have an idea that we were following that identical four."

"An' I feel putty sartin of it!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie.

"Come on back to where the attack was made," called out Wild, riding ahead.

He had learned that the family bore the name of Neil, and that the head of it had a brother at Skeleton Skit, where he was bound, to settle there and work at gold mining.

The missing daughter had the name of Jennie.

The mother got the team turned around in a jiffy, showing plainly that she knew all about the handling of horses.

Then they made for the spot where they had been attacked.

When they got there, Young Wild West promptly dismounted and began making an examination of the ground.

"We shot two of 'em," said Neil. "But I don't know whether they was killed or not."

"Where did they drop?" questioned our hero.

"Right here!" and, revolver in hand, the man stepped to where he thought was the place.

Wild lighted a match and took a look at the ground.

It did not take him two seconds to discover bloodstains on the grass.

"You are right!" he exclaimed. "Here is where one of them fell. He was bleeding pretty badly, too. Now, then, we must follow the trail. The bleeding man has made the way plain for us, no doubt."

He crept along on the ground, lighting a match every time one went out, and traced the dark red stains to the mouth of the gorge.

Then only a drop here and there could be found, showing that our hero was satisfied that the villains had proceeded through the gorge.

He gave orders for the wagon to halt and remain at its mouth until an investigation was made.

"Charlie, you and Jim will ride ahead with me. I have an idea that the rascals are not far away," he said.

"All right," was the reply.

Neil and his wife and son took up their station at the mouth of the gorge and our three friends rode on through the darkness.

Young Wild West was ready to shoot the instant he came in sight of the men.

He knew perfectly well now that it was the work of the Branded Band, and he meant to rescue the girl at all hazards.

They rode along slowly, following the course of the stream.

In a couple of minutes they came to a halt and listened.

Then they heard voices talking in low tones.

Wild quickly located the direction the voices came from and then gave the word for his two partners to follow him.

He started his horse forward on a sharp trot and they followed, each holding his revolver ready for instant use.

The next moment they came upon Captain Dean and Powell.

"Hello, my friends!" called out Young Wild West, for he recognized the two villains instantly. "What are you doing here?"

"We're camping here," replied the leader of the Branded Band. "Our claim is right here—or the piece of ground we are going to work, rather."

"Is that so? Well, I don't suppose you have seen anything of a young lady around here, have you?"

"A young lady?" echoed the captain with affected surprise. "Why, certainly not."

"You haven't, eh? Well, where are the other two men who were with you?"

"They changed their minds about staying here and started back for Skeleton Skit."

"Did they go after they were wounded by the men with the wagon?" asked Wild coolly.

Captain Dean saw that the game was up.

He raised his revolver, but before he could shoot at the boy a low voice that was as steady as a rock exclaimed:

"Drop that, my friend!"

Young Wild West had the drop on him, and no one realized it any quicker than the scoundrel himself.

Captain Dean let the revolver fall to the ground.

Then he put on a big bluff.

"See here, Young Wild West," he exclaimed. "It seems to me that you are paying a whole lot of attention to me. I told you before that I was sorry I had made a mistake in you, now why can't you let me alone?"

"I will let you alone when you have got your just deserts, you scoundrel!" was the reply. "Now, then, unless you give the word for your men to free the girl you have a captive, I will put a bullet into your brain! I mean what I say!"

"I know of no girl being a captive."

"I will give you just two minutes to do as I say. If you would rather be a dead man than a live one, all right."

Just then two revolver shots sounded from a point not far distant.

Then a female voice screamed:

"Help! Save me! Help—help!"

Captain Dean might have made a good actor, for he affected great surprise.

"That must be the girl you are looking for," said he.

"I think so," was the reply. "Now, then, just give orders for her to be let free."

"Tell me who to give orders to and I will be glad to do so."

"Give orders to your men."

"I have no men. Powell is the only one here with me."

Wild was becoming just the least bit angered at the way the man was acting.

"Boys," said he, turning to his two partners, "just keep these fellows covered. I'll go and find the girl."

"We'll take care of them," answered Jim. "I guess they had better hold their hands over their heads while I take their weapons from them."

A threatening move from him caused the two villains to put up their hands.

Young Wild West dismounted and started on foot in the direction the shot and cries had come from.

All was as silent as the grave now, but he had marked the spot well in his mind.

Wondering why the girl had ceased shouting for help, he hastened forward.

Both his eyes and ears were wide open and he held his revolver ready for instant use.

He crossed the brook and soon was right in front of the cave the captive girl had been placed in by the villains.

But he did not know it was a cave, as the boulder effectually concealed the entrance.

However, there were other openings in the rocks, and he was soon making an examination of them.

Wild knew it would not do for him to enter any of the underground places, as he might be running into a trap.

He was quite certain that there were more of the men belonging to the Branded Band in the vicinity.

He kept working his way along until he reached the cave the band of villains had as a headquarters.

And when he got there he was treated to a sudden surprise, such as he was hardly looking for.

Two men pounced upon him as quick as a flash of lightning and one of them clapped a hand over his mouth, while the other knocked his shooter from his hand.

Then a third came to the assistance of the others and he was picked up and carried into the cave.

There was little or no noise, too, in the movements of the villains, and though he struggled and tried to let his partners know what happened to him, it was useless.

The three men held him firmly.

In less than a minute Young Wild West was bound and gagged.

Then he was dragged back into the darkness and deposited on the rocky floor of the cave.

The daring boy was more angered at what had happened than he was frightened.

He hated to be caught napping.

But such things occurred once in a while.

"I reckon we've got one of 'em, all right," said a low voice.

"Yes," chuckled another of the band. "I wonder which of 'em it is?"

"I don't know, but I hope it is Young Wild West himself."

"Well, jest hold up a blanket, an' I'll light a match an' see. I reckon it won't be seen from ther outside."

"No, it can't be seen, 'cause we're close behind a wall," spoke up another.

A match was lighted and held close to our hero's face.

"It's Young Wild West, as sure as guns!" exclaimed the villain who had spoken first. "My! But this is what I call a whole streak of luck."

"Yes, it is. But his pard's has got ther captain an' Powell, I reckon."

"Well, they won't have 'em long. Now that we've got Young Wild West, I reckon we needn't be afraid to go over there. Come on, fellers! We'll sneak over an' turn ther tables on 'em."

"One will do to stay here with ther boy, I reckon."

"I'll stay!" cried one of them.

"Good enough! Come on!"

As they started to leave the cave Wild made another desperate effort to free himself.

"It ain't no use to do that," said the man who remained to watch him. "I tied them knots myself, an' when I tie knots they don't come loose very easy. You may as well make up your mind that you've got to die, Young Wild West!"

Our hero realized that it was really useless to waste his strength just then, so he settled down into quietness and listened.

A minute of extreme silence followed.

Then the cracking of revolvers came to his ears, followed by the yells of men.

Rapidly approaching footsteps could be heard, and then more shots rang out.

"Give it to them, boys!" cried the voice of Captain Dean. "There is only two of them." Don't run!"

He was running himself, however, and he was the first to reach the cave.

Only three of the men came in after him, though, and they appeared to be pretty badly scared.

"We got you an' Powell away from 'em, cap," said one in a hoarse whisper, "but it cost somethin' to do it. Who was ther two what went down?"

"Judson was one," answered Powell.

"An' Tom Larkin was ther other," added another.

"You should have finished them, boys!" cried Captain Dean wildly. "Oh! If I only had my shooters when you fellows came there! They were keeping a good watch and they saw you. They shot in quick order, and then it was our chance to cut and run for it. It won't do to let those two fellows get out of the gorge. If they do it will be all up with us. Come! We have got to finish them!"

The villain had possessed himself of weapons now, and he hastened from the cave, followed by the rest of the gang.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHO SIMON SALTER WAS.

It would be well for us to explain the cause of the disappearance of Simon Salter, the man from Salt Meadow, New Jersey, as he claimed to be.

When Young Wild West and the rest went into the saloon after the wrangle about the Branded Band, Simon, as we shall call him, turned his footsteps along the trail in the direction the men he was so sure were villains had come from.

As soon as he was out of the camp, he lost all his slow and simple way, and started on a brisk walk.

"I guess I'll know something about this Scourge of Skeleton Skit before morning," he muttered. "I have got to be a good one to get ahead of Young Wild West in breaking up the gang, though. But he is working for glory, and I am working for money. It will do me more good if I capture Dean Dover than it would do him if he did. I hope he won't shoot the scoundrel, that's all. I suppose I will have to tell him who and what I am, or he will, before the business is over. Young Wild West don't know that I have come all the way from Frisco after the most dangerous criminal ever known in that city, and that Dean Dover is the man. I will have to let him know that I am a detective, duly authorized by the governor of Colorado to make an arrest within its borders. Well, I will explain matters to him in the morning, and it may be that he will help me out. I guess I play the part of a greenhorn from the State of New Jersey pretty well, for I hardly think either Young Wild West or his partners have had any suspicion that I was anything but what I represented myself to be."

But the detective was wrong on his last conclusion, as the reader is already aware.

Both Young Wild West and Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart were satisfied that Simon Salter was not nearly as green as he looked.

Simon was under the impression that Dean Dover's haunt was somewhere in the vicinity of Skeleton Skit, and he was bent on finding it that night.

The detective was used to the mountains, as he had worked among them for a year or two, and he was keeping a sharp lookout for any trail that might lead from the main one.

He paused every now and then, for he did not want the man Powell and the miners who had come that way to cut down the body of the man that had been hanged and bury it to see him.

He was almost positive that the fellow was one of the Branded Band.

The detective had not known of the existence of such a band until he heard it in the stage coach on the way over.

But he had strong reasons to believe that the man he was looking for was in Skeleton Skit, and when he got a look at Dean Dover that night he was positive that he was the man he was after.

The fact of his going by the same name was sufficient to bear him out in his belief.

Simon was not more than five minutes behind the men when he left.

But they had gone on horseback and he was afoot.

That made a whole lot of difference.

He thought that they would have finished their task and be on their way back before he covered the two miles.

But he was mistaken in this, for as he neared the spot where the hanging had taken place he heard the sounds of voices.

The disguised detective now became very cautious.

Keeping well in the shadows, he advanced.

Two minutes later he got a sight of the men.

They had just finished their rather grewsome task and were getting ready to go back to the mining camp.

Simon lay low and listened to what they were saying.

But their talk was nothing that would possibly give him a clew.

"Well," he muttered, "I suppose I will have to hunt around a bit. I could arrest Dean Dover right away, but there would be more or less trouble about it, for the majority of the miners would take it up for him. I will wait until I know for a certainty that he is a member of the Branded Band. Then the miners will soon become aware of the fact, and it will be easy enough to convince them that he is the man I am after."

He remained in hiding until the men got on their horses and started for Skeleton Skit.

Then he got up and began searching carefully for some sort of path that led from the trail.

He kept on until finally he reached the mouth of the gorge.

It struck the detective that he at last had found the place he was looking for.

He went cautiously through the gorge, keeping close to the little brook and well under the cover of the left slanting bank.

He did not want to be discovered by any of the Branded Band.

Simon was well armed, though he had not seemed to be when at the mining camp.

He had a brace of up-to-date revolvers, and a keen-edged hunting-knife.

One of the revolvers he kept in his right hand as he picked his way along through the gorge.

The man soon reached a point that was not far from the spot where the several caves were located.

Then he heard low voices.

"Ah!" he exclaimed under his breath, "I guess I have found the hang-out of the villainous band. Now, I will scout around a bit and learn all about it."

He had not moved very far when he came to a cave.

Less than fifty feet from this the voices seemed to come from.

The detective crept into the mouth of the cave. "This is good enough," he muttered. "I'll just lie down here and take things easy till Dean Dover comes. I feel that he certainly will come here before morning, so I may as well make up my mind for a good wait. Just let me make sure that he is the leader of the gang that has been making so much trouble around Skeleton Skit and I will get ready to act."

Simon got into a comfortable attitude, and then tried to catch what was being said by the men in the adjoining cave.

But the villains were talking in very low tones, and he could not do so.

Beyond the hum of their voices and the chirping of a cricket all was as still as the grave.

Simon had slept but little the night before, and the long ride in the stagecoach had tired him out.

He began to grow very sleepy.

"It ain't the right sort of a place to take a nap," he thought. "I must keep my eyes open."

He got into a sitting posture, but the drowsy feeling came over him again.

Then he lay down again.

Pretty soon he was dozing, and it was not long after that when he was sound asleep.

How long he remained in that condition he did not know, but he was awakened by hearing the tramp of horses and the sound of voices right near to him.

The detective became aroused to the full sense of his position almost instantly.

He crouched low to the ground and listened.

Then he could scarcely credit his senses.

He distinctly heard the voice of Dean Dover, and the words the villains uttered indicated that he had a girl captive!

One minute more and Simon understood just what was going on.

He was much elated, for he felt certain that he was not likely to be caught.

Pretty soon he heard the men coming straight for the cave he was in.

The detective thought it was time he changed his position, so he got up and crept softly to the rear of the cave through the Stygian darkness.

It was probably well for him that he did so, for the next moment the girl was carried into the cave.

Simon got into a niche that seemed to have been formed there for that very purpose.

Then he heard all that transpired, being able to dimly see the figures of the actors in the little drama.

"It's the Branded Band, sure enough," he exclaimed under his breath. "And Dean Dover is at the head of it. My! How the villains have been deceiving the simple-minded miners at Skeleton Skit! No wonder the scoundrels have had such an easy thing of it since they have been here! And they have had the audacity to seize a young lady from somewhere and bring her here. Well, I guess I am in a great run of luck. I'll just save this girl and take her to the mining camp, and then I'll see Young Wild West and his partners and tell them who I am and what I have learned."

Remaining quiet in the niche, he waited until the villains had closed up the cave.

He was going to make himself known to the girl then, but she fell into a fit of weeping, and he thought he had better wait until she calmed somewhat.

After a while she quieted down, and then, just as he was making a move to get out of the niche, she sprang to her feet and fired her revolver, following it up with shouts and screams for assistance.

"Calm yourself, miss," called out the detective. "A friend is here to save you!"

"Wha-a-at!" stammered the surprised girl, scarcely believing her senses when she heard the voice of a man so near her.

"I was in the cave all the time," went on Simon. "I thought it would be foolhardy for me to interfere while those men were here. We must get out and steal away without their knowing it. Now, just be calm, please."

"I will," was the quick reply.

One of the outlaw band had lighted a lantern and left it burning dimly in the cave.

By the aid of this the detective saw that the girl was rather beautiful, both in face and figure.

"Pardon me," he said, politely, "I may look like the greenest kind of a tenderfoot, but I am not. I am a detective, miss, and I came to Colorado for the express purpose of capturing the leader of the band who brought you here. Don't make any more noise now, or they may come here."

"I'll be still, for I can see that you are telling the truth."

"Well, just remain perfectly quiet, now, and if we hear nothing of the men we will make a move to get out of here. They have sealed up the mouth of the cave pretty well, but I guess we will be able to break the seal."

"I don't know how to thank you, sir."

"I am not entitled to any thanks. It was a lucky thing that I got in this cave ahead of you, that's all. It is luck, miss, nothing but luck, and good luck, at that!"

"Yes, I guess you are right. You will find that I will help you all I can, for I am used to danger, and therefore am not as nervous as some of my sex."

"That makes it all the better for us, then."

They listened and heard the sounds of a commotion not far away.

"Something has happened out there," whispered the detective.

"Yes," nodded the girl.

"Sounds as though they have got hold of some one."

Jennie Neil looked uneasy when he said this.

She was quite sure that her parents and brother had escaped the masked villains, and she thought it might be possible that they had come to look for her and run into a trap.

She told him of her fears.

"It might be," Simon said. "But if they did catch anybody just then they did it mighty slick, because there was not the least bit of a cry. There was only just the sounds of a scuffle, and that ended pretty quick. What's your name, miss, if I may be so bold as to inquire?"

"Oh, excuse me. I forgot to tell you before. My name is Jennie Neil."

"Good! My name is Simon Salter, for the present, anyway."

"Then that isn't your real name?" and the girl looked at him in surprise.

"No. I suppose I had better tell you my real name, after all, and be done with it. I am Louis Everett, and I reside in San Francisco. But you need not mention it when we get to Skeleton Skit. Just call me Simon Salter, of Salt Meadow, New Jersey. I don't want the miners to know who I am until the proper time comes."

"Very well, Mr. Salter."

The detective was now at the mouth of the cave.

He stooped so as to get his shoulder against the flat stone that was across the entrance, and then gave a push.

But the stone would not move!

Again he tried, with the same result.

"I guess you'll have to lend me a hand, Miss Neil," he said, turning to his fair companion.

"I'll do my best," and she stepped over to assist him.

The two then pushed against the stone.

It yielded a trifle, but did not turn over.

"There's something against it," whispered Simon. "We will try this end; maybe it might move out easier. If this end don't, we will try the other."

They got ready and pushed hard where he indicated.

Slowly but surely the slab moved.

In ten seconds they had it open far enough for them to crawl through.

Just then the cracking of revolvers came to their ears!

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEATH'S-HEAD BRAND.

Captain Dean had not much more than got out of the cave when he changed his mind about hunting for Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart for the purpose of putting an end to them.

He stumbled over the body of one of his followers, who had managed to get there before his life left him.

That made the leader of the Branded Band think differently.

He felt that if they attacked the two deadshots more of his band would get killed.

"Come back, boys!" he exclaimed in a low tone. "We will try another scheme."

The men were very glad that he had changed the programme, and the sighs of relief that came from them told quite plainly.

"What are you goin' to do, cap?" asked Powell.

"Pry the boulder away from the passage in the rear of the cave!" exclaimed the captain.

"What! You ain't a-goin' to take ther horses an' light out, are you?"

"Yes."

"I thought that was only in case we had to git out," and the villain looked surprised.

"Well, it strikes me that we've got to get out now. Young Wild West's partners will surely come here, and they will most likely bring some of the miners with them. Then we will be all up with us, won't it? We will take to the little glen the other side of the wall of rock."

"All right, cap!"

There were only four of them able to do anything, but they soon had rolled aside a good-sized boulder, disclosing a passage that was large enough to admit a horse.

The two men were now on their feet and waiting.

Then the others got the horses and the leader of the Branded Band gave the word to pass through.

"Take some of the articles that we will need, but leave enough to make our enemies think that we have simply gone off in a hurry with the expectation of returning," said Captain Dean.

His commands were obeyed.

When the horses were through the narrow passage, which only extended about a hundred feet, and opened into a little glen, two of the scoundrels picked up the helpless form of Young Wild West and carried him through.

"It would be a good idea to kill him, an' save ther trouble of luggin' him along," observed Powell.

"Oh, no," answered the leader. "We may have to use him. He must not be killed just now."

When our hero heard these words he felt pretty safe.

He was quite satisfied that his companions would not be long in finding him, even if the men succeeded in closing the passage after them.

Though gagged and bound, he could still see, and the lantern burning low in the hands of one of the men enabled him to get a good view of the passage.

When he was carried through to the glen and placed in a clump of bushes the leader of the gang gave the word for two of the men to close the passage the best they could.

"I guess if anyone comes through they will wish they hadn't, for they will drop dead the instant they show themselves," he said. "But I don't think they will attempt to come through. They will simply come into the cave, after they are quite sure we are gone, and then they will most likely come to the conclusion that we have gone somewhere else—not through the back of the cave, but from the way we came in."

Wild felt like chuckling when he heard this.

He knew pretty well that Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart could not be fooled as easily as all that.

But Captain Dean, when he had thought the matter over, decided to seal up the end of the passage that opened into the glen.

There were plenty of stones and boulders to be found right at hand, and at a word from him the three, who were able to work, set in and soon had it blocked effectually.

The back of the glen was almost V-shaped, and down from the heights above a miniature cascade tumbled.

It was this that fed the brook that ran through the gorge.

The leader of the gang that had suffered pretty hard that day turned up the wick in the lantern and then located a spot to camp at.

It was in the center of a little level that backed right up to the walls of the cliff, and across the front of which was a fringe of high bushes.

To the left was a sort of natural pathway that led to the ridge above, and it was by taking this that one could come out on the trail almost in sight of Skeleton Skit; or, if he chose, he could strike over a rough and uneven place and strike it on the other side of the mouth of the gorge.

But the latter course could not be taken on horseback.

"I guess this will do," said the captain, as he took a seat on the trunk of a fallen tree. "Now, bring Young Wild West here. I have an idea."

"An idea, cap?" queried Powell, who was ever ready to ask questions.

"Yes; I think it will be a good idea to make our prisoner one of our band."

"But it ain't likely he'll agree to become a member of ther Branded Band, cap," spoke up another.

"Oh, I guess he'll agree to almost anything before I get through with him. We will brand him first of all."

"If you do, jest brand him deep, captain," spoke up the wounded man called Gene.

"Oh, I will do that all right. Fetch him here!"

Our hero was lying in the bushes but a few feet from the villainous leader of the Branded Band, and he heard every word that was said.

Two of them picked him up and dragged him before the captain.

"Young Wild West," said the scoundrel, throwing the rays of the lantern in the boy's face, "we are going to brand you. I am now willing to admit that I am one of the Branded Band, the leader, too. I am the Scourge of Skeleton Skit, and I am proud of it. When your body is found your breast will bear the brand of the death's head, so the miners will then think surely that you were one of those who have been robbing them for the past weeks. I rather think that you are sorry you ever attempted to bother with us now, ain't you?"

It struck him just then that the captive could not answer him if he wanted to.

Holding his revolver in his right hand, he drew his knife with the left and then cut the cords that held the improvised gag in Wild's mouth.

"You can talk now, Young Wild West," he said. "But be careful that you do not talk very loud. If you attempt to cry out you will be sorry for it, I promise you."

"I guess I won't cry out," replied our hero, coolly. "I don't see anyone to cry out to, in the first place, and in the second I won't have to. My friends will find me soon enough without that."

"Ah, you think so, do you?"

"I am certain of it."

"You take things very coolly, it seems," observed the villain.

"Why shouldn't I? I am used to being in such scrapes as this."

"Oh, you are, eh? Well, you have never been branded with a red-hot iron, have you?"

"No, but I have come pretty near to it a few times. I am not branded yet, either."

"No, but you will be soon enough. I am going to brand the skull and crossbones on your breast, and when that is done I am going to give you a chance to take the oath that will make you one of the Branded Band. If you do this you will be allowed to live, and if you refuse you will die."

"Well, I suppose I will have to die, then," was the calm rejoinder.

The villains looked at each other in surprise.

The boy's coolness was amazing to them.

He acted as though he did not value life as being much, and they could not understand how it was that he could act that way.

"You are putting up quite a bluff, Young Wild West," observed Captain Dean, after a pause. "But I guarantee you that I mean business."

"You may mean business, but I'm satisfied that you won't carry it out."

"Why?" and there was a tinge of earnestness in the question.

"You won't live long enough."

A deep silence followed our hero's words.

"You don't suppose that I came through the gorge to-night without knowing the lay of the land around here, do you?" went on Wild, resolving to give it to them good and strong. "You don't know but that at this very minute your heart is covered by the muzzle of a rifle."

The words had no little effect on the band.

The men looked about them apprehensively.

Even Captain Dean thought there was something in it.

"Well, Young Wild West," he said, "I have made up my mind to brand you, anyway, and after that is done you have either got to take the oath of allegiance or die!"

Wild began to grow uneasy.

He saw that the scoundrel really meant to carry out the programme he had laid out.

But he was quite certain that Charlie and Jim would not leave the vicinity until they found where he was, and made a bold attempt to rescue him.

"They must certainly know that the villains are here," he thought. "It is not likely that they went far away. Well, I have got to keep them from branding me, that's all, and give my partners a chance to do something."

The captain told one of the men to gather some twigs and dry wood and start a fire.

The fellow was only too glad to do it.

He soon had a pile that would make a roaring fire, if necessary.

"We don't want such a very big fire," said Captain Dean. "It will not take a great heat to get the iron hot. The brand is only made of heavy wire, you know."

"Yes, an' it touches all over when you press down on it," spoke up Powell. "That's how it leaves ther marks so plain on our breasts."

"We were not much more than touched by the brand," said the leader of the gang, who was so proud to call himself the Scourge of Skeleton Skit. "Young Wild West will have the brand held against his naked breast until it burns right into the flesh. He has either got to be a member of the Branded Band in life or in death!"

A hoarse chuckle went up from the men.

They took what the captain said as a good joke.

Hardened to crime as they were, such things were funny to them.

A fire was started, and then Captain Dean took the brand from his saddle-bags.

It was a rather crude affair, but the outlines were true to what it represented.

It was made of telegraph wire, and the captain had been the maker himself.

He straightened it out to his satisfaction, and as soon as the fire had burned down a little he put it over the glowing embers.

"Lay the prisoner on his back and open his shirt wide," he said. "It would be a shame to burn that blue silk shirt, which must have cost him ten dollars. And that buckskin coat, too, we must not scorch that."

The three villains who were able to do duty quickly seized our hero and threw him on his back.

"See here," said Wild. "If you do brand me before my friends come, you can make up your minds that you will never leave this place alive. That is all I want to tell you. If I carry the death's head and crossbones on my breast for the remainder of my life, every time I look at it I will think of how the Branded Band was annihilated without any show of mercy. Now, then, go ahead and do your worst. You will find that I can stand the hot iron against my flesh. But the minute you put it there, look out!"

The men were opening his shirt now, and the flames lighted up the scene where the brave boy was lying.

There was not the least sign of fear on his face, and as Captain Dean looked at him he hesitated.

"Young Wild West," said he, "you are about the coolest customer I ever came across. I have met all kinds of men in my lifetime, but I must say that I never did run across one like you. If you are bluffing you are a good one, that's all."

"You will soon find out whether I am bluffing or not," was the retort.

"Well, you will find out right away that when I undertake to do anything I always finish it. You ought to know that. Don't you see that I have taken the risk of lighting a fire to carry out my purpose? I am a desperate man, I am."

"Well, you didn't seem to be so desperate when I faced you on an equal footing to-night," was the reply. "I guess there is a whole lot of bluff in you."

"There is, eh? We shall see!"

Captain Dean found a pair of nippers in his saddle-bags, and he reached to the fire and took hold of the wire brand with them.

It was heated to a bright red now.

"Here you go, Young Wild West!" he exclaimed. "Now, boys, hold him tight!"

He was just about to apply the red-hot brand to Wild's breast when a deafening explosion rang out right near them!

CHAPTER X.

CHARLIE FINDS A WAY TO GET TO THE VILLAINS.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart had certainly given the members of the Branded Band more than they wanted.

They dropped two of them, in spite of the fact that it was very dark and they could scarcely distinguish the forms of the men.

When the villains had retreated to their cave, Charlie and Jim simply remained behind the clump of rocks they had rushed to after firing their revolvers.

They had their horses, but they gave no thought of mounting them and riding away.

Young Wild West was somewhere around, and they did not mean to leave without him.

He had gone to find the woman who had fired the shot and screamed for help, and they were simply waiting for him.

It occurred to them that something must have happened

to him, since the outlaws had attacked them, and Wild had not showed himself.

They remained behind the rocks, listening for the least noise that would indicate that the Branded Band was going to renew the attack.

Suddenly they heard footsteps.

Someone was walking along on the opposite side of the brook.

Instantly they turned their eyes in that direction.

Then it was that they saw the forms of a man and a woman proceeding very carefully, as though afraid of being discovered.

"Hist!" exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie.

He was heard, for the two instantly came to a stop.

At first they thought it was Wild, but a second glance showed them that it was not.

Charlie crept to the edge of the brook.

"Hello!" he called out in a whisper. "We are friends."

"Good!" was the reply in a low tone. "Is that you, Young Wild West?"

"No, but we are his partners."

"Well, we'll come over then. I'm Simon Salter."

"Oh!"

"An' I've got a young lady with me."

"Yes; come on!"

"She was a prisoner of the Branded Band, and I was lucky enough to be in the cave where they put her."

"That was lucky," declared the scout. "Didn't you see anything of Young Wild West?"

"No."

Simon now took the girl in his arms and waded across the brook.

"So Young Wild West ain't here, then?" he said, as he looked at the faces of the two.

"No. He heard the scream of the young lady and went to look for her," replied Jim.

"Well, then you can bet they have got him!" exclaimed Simon. "I heard the noise made by a struggle a few minutes before the shooting began. They have got Young Wild West a prisoner, you can bet!"

"It looks that way, anyhow," said Cheyenne Charlie.

"You can bet that I am right. Well, I happened to hear something as I came out of the cave with Miss Neil. I heard them start out to wipe you fellows out. Then their leader changed his mind and said they would leave their cave by the back way. We waited until they had talked it over, and then we heard them lead their horses somewhere. They are not here in the gorge now; I am certain of that."

"An' that means that we can't find 'em too quick!" cried Charlie.

"But you had better be careful how you go at it, just the same. There is no telling what they have done, or what they might do, you know. Miss Neil says her parents and brother must be around somewhere. Do you know where they are?"

"Yes, right up the gorge," answered Jim. "We told them to wait there till we got back."

"Well, I will take her to them, and then I'll come back and help you find Young Wild West."

Charlie and Jim were a little surprised at the way the Jerseyman talked.

He had dropped his drawling tones, and now talked in a way that showed quite plainly that he knew what he was doing.

"We'll wait. But hurry up," said the scout.

The detective nodded and started off with the girl.

"What do you think of the fellow now, Charlie?" whispered Jim, when they had disappeared in the darkness.

"Jest about what I thought," was the retort. "I was putty sartin' that he wasn't as green as he tried to make out. He's around here for some purpose, you kin bet your life!"

Both were anxious to find Wild.

They were afraid the villains, if they had really captured him, might kill him.

They were on pins and needles, to use the expression, until Simon Salter got back.

It was not over six minutes from the time he left them until he returned, although it seemed to be much longer.

"I left the girl with her relatives," he said. "Now, let's get down to business. In the first place, I want to tell you that I am a detective from 'Frisco, and that I came here to capture Dean Dover, who is the captain of the Branded Band. I knew nothing about the Branded Band until I got to Skeleton Skit, but I do know that he is the man I am after. I want to take him alive, do you understand?"

"All right," answered Charlie. "I reckon we kin help you somewhat. What we want to do first, though, is to git Wild, if they've got him."

"They have got him—I am quite sure of that. I heard a short struggle not long after the girl called for help. You say he came to look for her, so that makes it just about the time. They must have taken him by surprise."

"Well, if they've killed Wild I reckon you'll never tak Dean Dover alive!" exclaimed the scout. "If that has happened I'll riddle him with bullets ther instant I set eyes on him!"

"If I don't get him alive I won't get one-half as much in the way of a reward," replied the detective. "But I don't think they have dared to kill Young Wild West. They know what the consequences would be if they did such a thing. They have probably got him a prisoner, and mean to hold him for the purpose of making terms with us."

This seemed quite plausible, so Charlie and Jim felt a trifle easier.

"We'll go to ther cave where they was," said the scout. "Come on! We kin leave ther horses here."

"There are a couple more horses, too," spoke up Simon, nodding to a clump of bushes.

"Yes," answered Jim. "They are the horses the captain of the band and the other fellow had. They didn't have time to take them when they got away from us."

"Why, did you have them?"

"Yes, we made prisoners of the captain and the fellow called Powell. We were in charge of them while Wild went to find the girl who fired the shot and screamed for help."

"And then the rest of the gang came out and attacked you and got the prisoners away from you?"

"Yes; but we shot two of them, though."

"They must have taken you by surprise to get the prisoners away?"

"Yes, we had 'em standin' here. We'd took ther shooters an' knives they had from 'em, an' when ther rest of ther gang sneaked up an' opened fire on us we had to look out for ourselves. That's how they got away."

Cheyenne Charlie, revolver in hand, started in the direction the villains ran when they rescued the captain and Powell.

Jim and the detective followed, all proceeding with great caution.

Not a sound could be heard to indicate the presence of anyone but themselves in that part of the gorge.

They crept up to the cave and soon came upon some blankets and other things that were scattered about.

This told them that they had struck the cave.

Jim Dart promptly went inside.

On his hands and knees he went around until he was fully convinced that there was no one there.

Then he took the risk of striking a match.

As the flame illumined a portion of the cave our friends readily saw that there was no one there.

One thing they saw before the match went out was a keg of gunpowder standing in a corner.

Jim lighted another match.

Then they found a lantern.

This was promptly lighted.

Besides the keg of powder there were two or three old muskets and a few blankets and some cooking utensils.

"They left in too much of a hurry to take all their things with them, I guess," said the detective.

"But that will come in handy, so I am glad they left it here," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie, pointing to the powder.

"It might—that is so," and Jim Dart nodded.

With the lantern they searched about the cave and soon found the narrow passage that led from the rear.

It was partly blocked by the boulder, but not sufficient to hide it much.

"So they went through here, did they," said Charlie, half to himself. "Well, if that's the case, I reckon we kin go through, too."

"If they haven't stopped up the passage at the other end," observed the detective.

"Well, if they have ther powder will come in handy, as I said it would."

"That's so."

"Are you going through, Charlie?" said Jim.

"Yes!" exclaimed the scout. "I'm goin' through. Wild has got to be saved, and that's all there is about it."

"All right. I am with you. It is a case of live or die."

"I like to hear you talk that way," said Simon Salter, or Louis Everett, as we may as well call him now. You fel-

lows are made of the right kind of material. But don't shoot Dean Dover, if it comes to a fight."

"All right. If Wild is all right that's all we care about," replied Charlie.

They made their way through the passage softly. They soon reached the end of it and found it blocked by small rocks and boulders.

"Ah!" said Charlie, grimly. "I reckon we'll have to git ther powder to work."

"Listen!" whispered Jim.

The sound of voices could be heard.

But the voices were so dim that they could not distinguish any words.

The scout gave a nod of satisfaction.

"We'll git ther powder an' blow our way through," he said. "Then we kin rush out on 'em an' give 'em fits afore they know what has struck them."

The detective appeared to be a trifle uneasy.

He was thinking that the man he wanted to take alive so badly might fall.

"Isn't there no other way to get there?" he questioned.

"Most likely there is, but we want to git there ther quickest way," Charlie answered.

"All right. Get the powder then."

They went back and soon got the keg.

It was full of the explosive, but the bung was out at the top head.

The scout soon made a fuse, and then at a word from him Jim and Everett picked up the keg of explosive and carried it through the passage.

"I reckon there'll be a little noise when this goes off," he remarked as he thrust the fuse in the bung.

"If it don't blow out a place big enough for us to get through I'll be very much mistaken," declared Dart.

"It may do some damage to Young Wild West," observed the detective.

"No," exclaimed Charlie. "Them voices is too far away. It won't reach 'em."

"We will have to run back into the cave until it goes off, won't we?"

"I reckon that will be ther safest."

When everything was in readiness Jim and the detective got ready to run back through the passage.

"I'm goin' to let her go now!" said the scout.

He struck a match and applied it to the fuse, which was rather short.

"Now, leg it!" he cried. "Git out of ther way!"

He paused long enough to note that the fuse was sputtering and that the spark was rapidly nearing the bung-hole.

Then he ran after his companions.

But before either of them reached the cave the explosion took place.

There was a deafening crash, followed by a sudden draught of air that nearly threw them off their feet.

Then all was still as the grave.

"I reckon somethin' has happened," remarked the scout, as he started through the passage in the cloud of smoke. "Come on! We've got to save Young Wild West!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

As the explosion rang out some of the members of the Branded Band fairly fell over themselves in their excitement and dismay.

Captain Dean dropped the red-hot brand on the ground and made a leap for the bushes.

Fragments of rock flew all about them, and the air was filled with dust and smoke.

Young Wild West was the least surprised of them all.

It occurred to him instantly that his friends were responsible for the explosion.

That being the case, he was going to be freed pretty quickly.

But Captain Dean was quick to think, too.

It occurred to him that the partners of their captive had blown up the rocks at the mouth of the passage in order to reach them.

He recovered himself almost in a second.

"Mount and away, boys!" he exclaimed, in a hurried voice. "We haven't a minute to lose!"

The men hastened to obey, even the two wounded fellows springing forward.

Their companions assisted them to the backs of their steeds and then mounted themselves.

As he was ready to leave Captain Dean turned and fired two shots at the spot where he had left Young Wild West lying.

There was too much smoke for him to see whether the shots took effect or not, but he felt that had no time to go any further just then.

Up the path they rode in single file, the wounded men ahead.

As they disappeared a sigh of relief escaped our hero's lips.

He had anticipated that the villains might attempt to take his life before they left, so when they leaped for their horses he began rolling himself over and over as well as he could without the use of his hands.

The result was that he got at least ten feet from where he had been lying when the leader of the Branded Band fired.

The bullets did not go anywhere near him, and Wild felt like uttering a mocking laugh.

But he refrained from doing so, and then awaited developments.

Just as the hoofbeats of the villains' horses died out he heard someone coming from the direction of the passage.

"Hello, boys!" he called out. "Here I am!"

"Whoopee!" came the answer in Cheyenne Charlie's voice, and then the scout rushed up, followed by Jim Dart and the detective.

They were not long in finding Wild on the ground, and then a few quick strokes of Charlie's knife set our hero free.

"Where are ther measly coyotes?" the scout said, as he looked around in the darkness.

"They got on their horses and rode up the hill over there as soon as they could recover from the effects of the explosion," Wild answered. "You blew your way through the passage by powder, didn't you?"

"That's just what we did," replied Jim. "We found a keg of powder and it came in very handy, you can bet."

"Well, when the powder went off the captain of the band was just going to brand me with the death's head. The brand was red-hot, and if you had waited another second in setting off the powder I would have got it!"

"Well, I'm mighty glad I didn't wait," declared Cheyenne Charlie. "I wouldn't have felt good if you'd have to go through life with that ugly brand on you. But we were in time, thanks to ther detective here. He heard 'em say that they was goin' to leave by ther back of ther cave, an' that's how we come to know it so soon. We'd have found out that they done it, though, I s'pose, in a little while."

"I depended on you finding it out," said Wild. "But come! We had better go back. There is no need of us trying to follow those fellows on foot."

"That's right!" spoke up Everett. "I guess we have got the Branded Band on the run now, and it won't be so very long before we get them just where we want them. All I ask is that you let me take Dean Dover alive."

"We will help you get him," said Wild. "If he is wanted in 'Frisco we'll help you get him. The scoundrels have got the best of us for the time, but we will soon catch up with them. Anyhow, we know just who and what the Branded Band is composed of, and that is something to know, anyway."

"It is a whole lot more than the miners of Skeleton Skit knew, anyhow. I suppose there are some among them who won't believe that Dean Dover is one of them yet," observed Jim.

"Well, let 'em think as they please about it," retorted Charlie. "There are so many thick-heads among 'em that I don't wonder that the band had sich an easy time robbin' 'em of ther dust."

The four now made their way to the passage.

The explosion of the powder had torn away a big part of the passage and had sent the rocks and boulders flying in every direction.

But our friends did not stop to note the result.

They hastened through and came out into the cave.

Then they made for the spot where they had left their horses.

They found them just as they had left them.

The detective mounted one of the steeds that had been left by the captain of the band and Powell, and then they all rode up the gorge.

The Neil family were at the mouth, anxiously waiting for them, and when they found that they were all there they were much elated.

"I reckon we kin go right on to Skeleton Skit now," said the head of the family.

"Yes," answered our hero. "We will go with you, for I am satisfied that we won't be able to find the Branded Band to-night. But in the morning I intend to start out to look for the gang, and I don't intend to give up until they have had the finishing touch put to them."

Wild learned all that had happened on the way back to the mining camp.

It had been a pretty lively night for others, as well as himself, and the Scourge of Skeleton Skit was responsible for it all.

The team that pulled the wagon went along at a sharp clip, and when they rode into town the miners who were astir came out to welcome the wagon.

Every time a wagon arrived the population of the camp increased, and everyone was willing to get a hustle on and make a real town of Skeleton Skit.

Among those in front of the saloon to welcome the outfit were John Miller, Rounder, and Pike, the bully.

They all seemed to be surprised that Young Wild West and his partners and the Jerseyman should be escorting the family into camp, but no one commented on it just then.

"Boys," our hero said, as he came to a halt in front of them, "I have the pleasure of introducing you to the Neil family. They have come out here to settle. Neil has a brother here, so he just told me. Is he in the crowd?"

"Here he is!" cried a voice from one of the shanties not far away.

Then a miner came running forward, bareheaded and excited.

He was followed by a woman and two or three children, and all were full of joy at the expectation of meeting their relatives.

It was a very warm welcome that the Neils got, and when they had done shaking hands and kissing, Jennie turned to Young Wild West and said:

"It is to you and your friends that I owe my being here. If Mr.—"

"Simon Salter, Salt Meadow, New Jersey," interrupted the detective, for he thought maybe she might forget and speak his real name.

He was not ready to make his business known to the miners, and he wanted them to take him for what he was representing to be.

"If it hadn't been that Mr. Simon Salter was in a cave that the Branded Band made me a prisoner in I wouldn't have got away from the scoundrels as soon as I did."

"Branded Band, did you say, gal?" queried Barney Malloy, proprietor of the Ripstaver saloon. "You wasn't in ther clutches of ther Branded Band, was you?"

"Oh, yes!" was the reply. "The scoundrels attacked us, and father and Bill gave it to them so hot that they turned and rode away. My horse got scared and took me right where they were, and they made me a prisoner. But you can bet that they will be punished for it, for I heard Young Wild West say that he was going to put the finishing touch to the band before another day passed."

"That's right, gentlemen!" spoke up the detective, affecting the drawling manner he had been assuming while in the camp. "You kin bet Young Wild West will fix them rascals, an' I'm goin' to help him, begosh!"

Rounder took off his hat and proposed three cheers for our friends, and they were given with a will.

A few moments later the Neil family were trying to make themselves comfortable in the shanty of the brother.

Wild and his partners put up their horses, and as the detective started to take the one he had ridden to the shed, Pike stepped up and looked sharply at the steed.

"Hello!" he exclaimed, "what's this? Ther tenderfoot has got Powell's nag, or I'm a downright fool!"

"I don't know whose horse it is," replied Everett, "but I do know that one of the Branded Band was ridin' ther critter afore I come by him."

"Then you might as well say that Powell is one of 'em!" and the bully showed signs of being angry.

"You shut up!" said Young Wild West, turning and walking back. "If you go to picking any row I'll handle you worse than you were handled before. I want you to behave yourself, do you understand? You have caused about enough trouble here in Skeleton Skit, and if you don't look out you'll get a rope around your neck!"

Pike fell back at once, and then entered the saloon, growling as he did so.

When the horses were put away Wild led the way into the saloon.

Our friends had engaged sleeping quarters there, and they wanted to go to them.

Pike and several of those who had stuck to Dean Luter and Powell were there.

"See here," said one of the men, stepping up in a rather respectful manner. "We would like to know how ther tenderfoot come to git hold of Powell's horse."

"I found ther horse, after ther one who had been ridin' it had run away an' left him, I told you," retorted the detective. "You don't think I stole it, do you?"

Wild shot a glance at the men which plainly showed that he meant business.

"I guess you people are looking for trouble," he said coolly. "Before you go any further I want to tell you that I was a prisoner in the hands of the Scourge of Skeleton Skit to-night, and that I came very near having the brand of the skull and crossbones put on my breast. My partners arrived just in time to save me, so that is how I am here. I know just who the men who belong to the Branded Band are, and I also know that you are a lot of fools for allowing yourselves to be hoodwinked by a clever gang of scoundrels. You are either fools or you know who the men are that belong to the gang and are trying to shield them. Now, which is it?"

"It ain't neither, I don't think," retorted the fellow who had spoken.

"All right. If you really think that way, so much the better. Now you just wait until twenty-four hours from now, and then come to me and see whether I know my business or not. But if you insist on having trouble, just let yourselves go."

"We don't want no trouble."

"All right, then. Get out! It is time you were asleep."

One of them muttered something about going when they got ready, but a motion from Cheyenne Charlie caused him to start out of the place on a run.

The rest followed.

It was rather crowded quarters that our friends had to sleep in.

They were put in a rather small room along with the detective and John Miller, and they were forced to lie on blankets that were spread over the rough planks that formed the floor.

They arose pretty early the next morning and at once had breakfast.

"Now, boys," said Young Wild West, "we must get down to business. I have an idea that the Branded Band is not far away. We will go and hunt for the villains."

"I suppose I can go along?" spoke up Miller.

"Yes, you can go."

CHAPTER XII.

CONCLUSION.

When the outlaws made their escape from the glen after the explosion took place they did not go very far.

They found a natural cut through a rock hill about half a mile from the trail and came to a halt.

"This will be a good place to catch them if they follow us," said Captain Dean. "We can mow them down before they know what struck them. This is a sort of basin, and there is plenty of water here, so we can hold them off for a day or two if necessary. We must remain perfectly quiet, though, when we hear anyone around. Let them think we have gone on somewhere else and they may come through here. We are going to down Young Wild West and his partners, see if we don't! Then we will be all right, for the fools at Skeleton Skit will believe that we are all right."

"That's it, cap!" exclaimed Powell. "They're awful easy to fool at ther camp. I honestly believe that we could go there right away an' make ther majority of 'em believe that Young Wild West is ther leader of the Branded Band, an' that he's got his men hid away somewhere. Our word would go further than his, 'cause ther men all know us, an' they're only strangers."

"We won't go to Skeleton Skit to-night, though, boys; we may go to-morrow. But we want to fix these fellows first. I have an idea that I killed Young Wild West with

the two shots I fired just as we started from the glen. I could not see good for the smoke, but I shot right at the spot where he was lying on the ground."

They talked it over for an hour or two, all the while holding a sharp watch at both ends of the little cut. The night passed without them being disturbed.

When morning dawned and they could see their surroundings, Captain Dean gave a nod of satisfaction.

"This is all right," he declared. "It could not be better if we had the place made to order. We must not make a fire, though, for if they are looking for us they would see the smoke."

As they had brought nothing whatever to eat with them, the villains became uneasy.

"Somethin's got to be did, cap," said Powell. "What do you say if I take a sneak back to ther cave? I kin easily keep out of sight of 'em if they're around there. An' if I kin git there an' back all right I kin kill two birds with one stone. I kin git somethin' to eat, an' at ther same time, find out if Young Wild West got fixed when you fired ther shots at him."

"All right," nodded the captain. "If you want to take the risk, go ahead. But be very careful."

"You kin jest bet I'll be careful, cap. Leave it to me."

A few minutes later Powell started off.

He went on foot, of course, but as the distance to the glen was not great, he soon came in sight of it.

Cautiously the villain began to descend along the narrow path.

He began crawling toward the bags of provisions.

Nearer and nearer he got to them, and as he did so the more hungry he became.

In another minute he had his hands on the bag nearest him.

Powell was just going to gather in the rest of the articles and go up the ascent with them when a startling thing occurred.

It was startling to him, anyway, for an agile form sprang upon him and bore him to the ground!

Before he could utter a cry a hand was pressed over his mouth.

It was Jim Dart who had caught the villain so neatly.

Young Wild West had made a search of the vicinity, and finding no signs of the Branded Band anywhere around, concluded that it would be a good idea to go to the place where they had come so near placing the hideous brand on his breast.

When our friends got there and saw the things the outlaws had left behind them they concluded that it would be good policy to remain in hiding there.

They had been waiting there nearly an hour when Powell showed up.

Jim Dart had been the first to set eyes on the man, so he was given the opportunity to spring upon him.

But Jim no sooner had the man down than Cheyenne Charlie rushed to his assistance.

The two of them soon had Powell disarmed and bound.

"Fetch him back into the cave," said Young Wild West. "There may be more of them around, and we don't want them to know that we have got him."

John Miller and the detective picked up the prisoner bodily and carried him to the passage.

They took him on through and into the cave.

Then he was deposited on the ground.

Though Wild had not the least idea of shooting him, he drew his revolver and leveled it at his heart.

"Where are the rest of your gang?" he asked, speaking in an icy tone of voice.

"About a quarter of a mile from here," Powell quickly answered.

"They sent you here to get the provisions you left, I suppose?"

"I offered to come," responded Powell.

Wild thought a moment.

"I'll tell you what you can do," he said to Powell. "You can take the grub back to your gang right away."

"Do you mean that, Young Wild West?" cried the man, eagerly.

"Mean it? Of course I do. I am not in the habit of joking under such conditions as these. You can take the grub back to your friends, but we will go with you to see that you deliver it safely."

Powell's countenance had lighted up, but it fell again as if by magic.

"Untie him, boys," said Wild to his surprised companions. "All right!" answered Cheyenne Charlie, and then he quickly liberated Powell.

Wild then led the way through the passage to the glen.

Jim and Charlie brought the prisoner through.

Straight to the bags of provisions they took him, and then, at a word from our hero, he was loaded down with the bags.

"Now, then," said Wild, in a voice that was full of meaning, "I want you to take those things straight to the place where Captain Dean and the rest are awaiting you. I want you to walk right into their midst just the same as though you were not aware that we were behind you, and if you make them know that we are near, by word or sign, that very instant you will die. I don't know as there is any need of me saying anything further, so go ahead!"

"I'll do just as you say," came the answer. "I don't want to be shot."

Half a minute later he reached the cut.

"Ah!" exclaimed Captain Dean, stepping forward to meet him. "So you made out all right, eh, Powell? I am very glad of that. I thought you might run into a trap of some kind by going back there. Now, boys, we'll have something to eat."

Just then he noticed that Powell's face was deathly pale.

"What's the matter with you? You look as though you have seen a ghost!" he cried.

"Hands up!" came from Young Wild West, in a ringing tone. "The man who refuses, dies!"

Wild and his companions quickly let themselves be seen.

They each held a pair of revolvers and every man of the Branded Band was covered.

The leader of the band was going to make some sort of a reply when the detective stepped forward.

"Dean Dover," he said, "I want you for the murder of Jasper Moorehouse in San Francisco! I have followed you a long distance, but I have got you at last! There is enough against you to hang you three or four times, but I suppose once will have to do. I am Louis Everett, the 'Frisco detective."

"You will never take him alive, then!" screamed the villain, and he turned to dart away.

But he was not quick enough for Young Wild West.

With a quick movement he seized the villain's wrist, and then a sharp squeeze brought him to his knees.

Everett sprang forward and soon had a pair of handcuffs on the man.

This had just been done when Powell dropped the bags of provisions and started to run away.

He grabbed a revolver from the belt of one of the men as he did so and raised it to fire at Wild.

But a sharp report rang out before he could do it.

Cheyenne Charlie had been in time to prevent Wild from being shot.

Powell dropped dead!

The rest were glad to surrender and a few minutes later they were being led to Skeleton Skit.

When our friends got there a crowd quickly gathered.

"Gentlemen," said Young Wild West, getting upon a barrel, "we have brought to you all there is left of the Branded Band. Boys, just loosen their shirts and show them off."

This was done.

"Now, then, if anything is to be said against what we have done, let it come right away!" he added.

There was a short silence and then a cheer went up.

There is little more to be told.

The detective started off with his prisoner in due time and the rest of the members of the Branded Band were hanged in accordance with the custom of the country.

The Neil family settled down in Skeleton Skit, as did John Miller, who had become attracted by the pretty face of Jennie.

Young Wild West and his partners finished their trip without anything further happening and returned to Weston.

Next week's issue will contain "YOUNG WILD WEST'S DOUBLE DANGER; OR, THE SIGN OF THE SECRET SEVEN."

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE

CURRENT NEWS

Langhorne, Pa., a town of 825 population in the northern suburban section of Philadelphia, will tear down its jail because in two years it has had no use for it. No resident of the town has occupied the jail in that time.

Tolls for shipping using the Suez Canal, which were increased at the beginning of October, are to be further raised on January 1, 1917. On and after that date the tolls will be equivalent to \$1.50 a ton on laden vessels and \$1 on vessels in ballast.

A family in Nagasaki, Japan, is noted for the superiority of fireworks the members make. Among the strange designs they produce are pyrotechnic birds, which, when exploded, sail through the air and perform many movements exactly like those of living birds. The secret of making these wonderful things has been in possession of the eldest child of the family of each generation for more than four hundred years.

Bobcats are numerous in the vicinity of Galena, Nev. Two of these big cats gave the Nelson family at the Dahl Ranch anxiety. One walked to the back door and leaped upon the watch dog chained there. Driven away, it renewed the attack and was shot and killed. It was thought that this cat was rabid and the head was sent to the Pasteur Institute in Reno. The next day another bobcat, presumably the mate of the one killed, walked along the road in front of the house. This one was shot and wounded. The dog pursued the cat into the brush and killed it.

Fordham University, New York City, is to establish a summer military training camp patterned on the Plattsburg plan, if the Rev. Joseph A. Mulry, president of the university, can obtain the consent of his trustees. When a committee of the alumni submitted plans to him on October 25 they found Dr. Mulry a hearty advocate of preparedness. The camp will be open to any college student. The university is to assign twenty acres to the camp and to give the soldier students the use of the remaining eighty acres of the campus. The camp will be ready for use next June.

A Norwalk, Ohio, man started out hunting recently. He took with him his trusty dog and rusty gun to hunt rabbit or squirrel or woodcock, or whatever is in season. He grew tired and sat down on a log to rest. When he came home that night his wife asked, the first thing, about that \$125 a man had paid him in the morning. He searched every

pocket. Money gone! Consternation! Nothing to do but find it. So he set out into the night, lantern in hand, and traveled the back trail. He searched and searched, but all in vain, until he came to the log where he had rested. And there was the little musty roll that had caused all the trouble. He admits now he's a good hunter—for money.

That regular army life holds its rewards for the enlisted man is demonstrated by the story of Peder Pederson, as related in a news item sent to the New York World from San Juan, Porto Rico. Pederson enlisted at the age of twenty, and with fourteen out of his sixteen years of service on foreign duty he is able to retire at the age of thirty-six, credited with thirty years' service and pay at \$67 a month. Pederson, of course, benefited by the army regulations providing for double time for foreign service. He retired as a sergeant of ordnance and will live in Washington, D. C. He is not married, and he says that after he enjoys a little hunting and fishing he will try for some government position open to an ex-soldier.

At the Buffalo light station on Lake Erie a large deflector has been erected behind the fog horns to protect the city from the deep, penetrating sounds of the powerful instruments when they are in service. The device is described in the Popular Mechanics Magazine. It is about fourteen feet in diameter and saucer-shaped. It consists of a steel shell having a four-inch packing of mineral wool between it and a facing of asbestos board. The device is attached firmly to the roof of the building and forms a backing for the megaphones. The device is reported to have proved sufficient not only in minimizing the volume of sound spreading back across the city, but in rendering the signals more distinct to navigators.

Bear Island, lying about 300 miles south of Spitsbergen, in the Arctic Ocean, promises to become an important source of coal, and has the advantage over Spitsbergen that cargoes may be dispatched throughout the year. An extensive coal field was worked there last summer. It is reported that the Norwegian government intends to establish a wireless and meteorological station in the island, as it has done in Spitsbergen. Bear Island lies at a meeting point between a cold ocean current from the northeast and the Gulf Stream Drift, and is usually shrouded in fog. The highest point is Mount Misery (1,759 feet). Countless seafowl inhabit the rocky shores and the "bird rock," on the south side of the island, is said to be the largest colony of its kind in the Arctic regions.

MR. WALL OF WALL STREET

OR

The Man Who Came from the Klondike

By DICK ELLISON

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER XX (Continued).

"You needn't want for money when I'm around," replied Fred. "I've got a good credit in the bank of British North America. I can get all I want. My idea is to hire one of the little steamers here, which have been built for exploring the creeks, and to go on after Jack. If I jump right in and get to work we ought to be able to start by to-morrow morning. Then we will be only one day behind Jack. I'll pay all expenses and settle with him later on."

It did not require very much persuasion to get Nellie to agree to this plan, and Fred at once started out to see what he could do.

There was very little trouble about it.

A small, light-draught steamer, with a comfortable cabin, was readily found.

Her name was the Sea Eagle, oddly enough, seeing that she had never seen the sea.

Fred engaged the services of a young man named Jack Lang, who held a captain's license for the river, to take command, and he agreed to find the crew and have all in readiness to start by seven o'clock next morning.

To make things more agreeable for Nellie, Fred insisted upon taking a woman as stewardess, and an elderly person named Mrs. Buffett was found by Captain Lang, who agreed to act in that capacity.

Having completed all these things, Fred returned to the hotel, where he found Nellie much calmer and ready to enter into his plan with all the energy which was naturally hers.

The evening passed without hearing anything of Dick Ditchett.

Fred waited in for him until eight o'clock and then, when he did not come, went out and did Dawson prettily thoroughly.

He fully expected to run against the detective somewhere, but he had seen nothing of him up to the time he was ready to give it up and go to bed, and that was nearly midnight.

Judge then of his surprise next morning, shortly after the Sea Eagle had turned away from the Dawson City levee and was running along the great Yukon River, toward the mouth of the Klondike, while he sat on the deck talking with Nellie, to see Dick Ditchett suddenly appear before him in the shape of one of the deck hands.

The detective was dressed to his part, and he

walked by Fred and Nellie without as much as looking at them.

Fred's first instinct was to call out to the man, but it suddenly came to him that he had better not.

"What is the matter with you?" demanded Nellie, who had not failed to observe the change which came over his face.

"Why, didn't you see that man?" replied Fred.

"The sailor, you mean?"

"Sailor nothing! It is Dick Ditchett, the detective."

"Why, Fred, surely you must be mistaken. Well, I declare! So it is."

"Of course, it is. He's a bit disguised, but he can't fool me."

"What on earth brought him aboard here?"

"That's what I've got to find out."

"Hadn't you better ask Captain Lang?"

"Wait a bit," replied Fred. "I may get a chance to speak to Ditchett myself, or he may speak to me."

But some hours passed and neither of these things happened.

Something else did, however, which made Fred glad he had held his tongue.

It was later in the morning when the detective again passed them on the deck, that he dropped a bit of twisted paper at Fred's feet, at the same time laying his finger on his lips, as much as to say, "Keep mum."

Fred turned around before picking up the paper and saw Captain Lang standing near the deckhouse, looking his way.

It was not the first time he had seen the young man thus regarding him, but he had given the matter no thought before.

"Nellie," he whispered, "there's something wrong aboard this boat. Don't touch that paper. I'll pick it up in a minute."

"What on earth do you mean?" demanded Nellie, looking alarmed.

"That's what I can't tell you just yet. I don't like the way Captain Lang keeps looking at me."

"Come, I thought it was me he was staring at!" exclaimed Nellie, tossing her head. "I suppose we are too much together—that's all."

"And that's none of his business," replied Fred, picking up the paper, for Captain Lang had now turned away.

"Well, upon my word!" he exclaimed, as, having unrolled the paper, he read the scrawl upon it.

Nellie snatched it away and read as follows:

"Fred—Beware! The captain is a notorious scoundrel; every man of the crew but myself is his friend. Don't know what they are going in for, but I have my suspicions. No immediate danger. Will let you know when there is. Caution Mrs. S. to have as little to do with the stewardess as possible. She is one of the gang.
D. D."

"Fred, what on earth shall we do?" exclaimed Nellie, turning deathly pale.

"Hush!" replied Fred. "Take it easy. We are in no immediate danger. I can't imagine what this means, unless these men have an idea that I am a millionaire, and that they mean to kidnap me."

"And did you give them to understand that you were very rich?"

"I did not, but I am afraid they think so. I very foolishly did say that money was no object, or words to that effect."

"We ought to turn back at once."

"If what Ditchett says is true, then the chances are we should not be allowed to do anything of the sort. Keep cool, Nellie. Leave it all to me."

Fred tore up the paper, and, throwing the scraps overboard, walked forward to find Captain Lang.

As he did so he limped and twisted his face up with an expression of pain—for a sudden idea had seized him, and as will be seen, it turned out a pretty bright one, too.

"Well, captain, what is our first stopping place?" he asked, leaning back against the rail.

"Why, the first place where the Sunrise stops is Gilbert's wharf," replied the captain. "We have passed that, as I didn't suppose there was any use in making inquiry there. The next is Badger Creek. We shall pull in there in about an hour's time."

"I am sorry we did not stop at Gilbert's wharf," said Fred. "There is no telling what freak Mr. Silver may take. I want you stop at every landing the Sunrise makes and give us a chance to go ashore and make full inquiries about Mr. Silver."

"Very good, sir. It shall be done. I will return to Gilbert's, if you say so."

"How long would it take us?"

"About three hours."

"That won't do. We shall have to cut it out. Oh! Ouch! Bless me, this is tough!"

"What's troubling you?" demanded the captain, as Fred screwed his face up again, "are you in pain?"

"It's rheumatism in this left leg of mine. If I only had some one to rub it for me I might get rid of this twinge. It yields readily to rubbing. I've been bothered with it for a long time. Can you spare one of the men? It seems to me you ought to be able to. You have plenty of them aboard here."

"No more than are needed to run this boat right," replied the captain in a quick way. "You can have one of them, of course. They are all in your pay."

"I'll take that fellow," said Fred, pointing to Dick Ditchett. "Send him to my stateroom, please."

He turned and went below, entering one of the three staterooms which the cabin contained, and in which he had placed his dress suit-case and other traps when he came aboard.

A moment later and a respectful rap came on the door, and in response to Fred's "Come in" Dick Ditchett entered.

"Good heavens, Fred!" he whispered, as he closed the door, "you are running a big risk in this. Why didn't you leave it to me?"

"Because I wanted to talk to you and find out what all this means," replied Fred. "Out with it, Mr. Ditchett. You have Mrs. Silver scared out of her life."

"And well she may be," replied the detective. "Let me tell you this: these men intend to seize the steamer as soon as it is dark and to put you two ashore at some lonely spot where you will stand a fine chance of starving to death. How does that strike you now?"

"It strikes me hard, and you know it. But what on earth does it all mean?"

"It means just this: These men want to capture the Golden Prophet, otherwise known as Mr. Wall of Wall Street. They know where he is, and I don't. They mean to carry him far up into the country and force him to locate claims for them. You cut no ice in their plans, and they jumped at the chance to get a steamer. They are going to dump you, Fred Morgan, just as sure as you are sitting there on the edge of that bunk."

CHAPTER XXI.

THE MIDNIGHT ATTACK ON THE SEA EAGLE

Fred took the revelation of Dick Ditchett more coolly, perhaps, than the detective had anticipated.

"Well, if we are in for it, I suppose it can't be helped," he said, "but what would you advise me to do?"

"To strip and let me rub you, according to schedule, for one thing. We shall have Captain Lang spying on us in a minute, surest thing you know. I have something to tell you, and I can whisper it while I work, but not another word must be said as we are talking now."

Fred pulled off his trousers and, stretching himself in the bunk, allowed Dick Ditchett to begin with his massage act.

The wisdom of the detective's suggestion was soon made plain, for before Dick had time to fairly get at it, there came a knock on the door.

"Who is it?" called Fred. "I am busy now."

"It's only me, Mr. Morgan," replied the captain's voice. "I've got a little liniment here which I think will do your leg good. It has helped me."

(To be continued.)

FACTS WORTH READING

WOMEN HELP PAVE THE STREET.

English women who are doing man's work have nothing on the women of Woodville, a small village west of Fremont, O. Because of the scarcity of labor there the women are assisting in the paving of First street. The women are hauling away in wheelbarrows the dirt dumped from the excavation in the street. "We can't get the men to do the work, so we are doing it ourselves," the women explain.

ELECTRIC FANS FOR FOWLS.

The birds on a poultry plant in California, Mo., are real high fliers. They have one convenience that no monarch could have enjoyed fifty years ago.

That convenience is electric fans. The fans and running water have been installed in the large feeding station of the A. B. Cole & Sons plant.

Under the spray of a fountain in the feeding station is the favorite haunt of the ducks and geese. The management has found the fans and water of economic value, as it saves the lives of many fowls and makes them fatten faster in the hot weather.

ITALY TO STOP EMIGRATION.

It is now generally admitted that the government committed a serious mistake in not prohibiting emigration to America as soon as war was declared. As all the men unfit for or exempted from military service were allowed to leave, many availed themselves of the chance to seek higher wages abroad, especially in North and South America.

The inevitable result was a scarcity of agricultural labor in Italy, which had to be remedied by granting leaves of absence to men with the colors at stated periods to cultivate the land. This remedy has, however, proved insufficient and did not lower wages or the high cost of living. As agricultural labor is scarce and wages high, naturally enough intensified cultivation of the soil is impossible and the prices of foodstuffs are dear.

By preventing emigration those exempted from military service will be bound to work in the fields and cultivation will be necessarily intensified, not only now but also after the war. In all probability emigration will be absolutely forbidden in the near future and passports will be refused to all Italians going to America.

BIG BATTLESHIPS THE CHEAPEST.

The winner of a prize essay published in the current issue U. S. Naval Institute Proceedings shows that, in the last analysis the big battleship is the cheapest battleship. Comparing the old 14,000-ton Mississippi with the new 27,000-ton Texas, he shows

that the former with a broadside weighing 5,480 pounds cost only one half as much as the Texas, whose broadside weight is 14,000 pounds; yet these very figures prove that the cost per pound of broadside was \$1,070 in the older ship and only \$720 per pound in the big ship. Moreover, the cost of yearly maintenance per pound of broadside was more than twice as great for the smaller ship.

The same author carries his argument further and shows that big ships are not only proportionately cheaper to build and maintain, but are in every particular superior fighting machines. "No one can dispute that as the size of the ships increases, so, proportionately, increase all those military features—size of guns, speed, seaworthiness, steaming radius, and protection, which are the essential components of the well-balanced ship."

ANCHOR YOUR FARM BY BLOWING IT UP.

The Federal Geological Survey is authority for the statement that an average of ninety-five tons of soil and loose rock are washed into the ocean every year from every square mile of territory in the United States. The stupendous amount of land washed away may be realized when it is taken into consideration that there are over 3,000,000 square miles of land in this country. This loss to the American farmer is gigantic, as it is obvious that the soil carried away is top soil—the richest in plant food and humus.

Is the best part of your farm being gradually washed away year by year? Do you allow the washes to develop into gullies to facilitate further the robbing of your soil? Have you failed to realize that the muddy creek flowing through your section is carrying a part of yours and your neighbor's farm away?

The question of checking this flow of farm land to the ocean is one that should be uppermost with every farmer. This loss cannot be stopped abruptly, but if every one would put his shoulder to the wheel and do his part, the great movement of farm land oceanward would, in a large measure, cease.

One of the best ways to permanently "anchor" your farm and stop the washing away of your land is by the use of dynamite. The idea is to deepen the soil reservoir and also to provide vertical drainage, so that the water, instead of "running off," will "run in." This is easily accomplished by blasting the subsoil.

In blasting the subsoil the hardpans are shattered, the subsoil is opened up to a depth of several feet, and the impervious subsoil broken, providing adequate drainage. By this means the water, instead of running off and carrying the farm with it, is held in the soil and conserved for the farmer's future use.

DRIVEN OUT WEST

OR

THE BOY TENDERFOOT OF LUCKY STRIKE

By "PAWNEE JACK"

(A SERIAL STORY.)

CHAPTER XII (Continued).

"Then you'd better prepare for them, sir, as they will come in sight in a minute from around those rocks and bushes."

"Do you wish protection at our rear?"

"No, indeed. We want to lend you a hand."

"Very well, gentlemen. Please keep off on the left flank," said the lieutenant, and he gave his men some hurried military orders, as Harry and Dan dashed away from the center of the column.

In a moment more the troop dashed ahead with their carbines held in readiness for action, and swept around the bend.

Not two hundred yards away the Indian advance guard was coming along full speed, and when the soldiers suddenly burst upon their view, they abruptly reined in with yells of alarm.

A moment afterwards they went racing back toward the main body of the tribe, and the cavalry made a charge.

Only the measured pounding of horses' hoofs was heard for a few moments; then the battle-cry of the savages arose.

No sooner was it uttered when they let drive a volley at the soldiers, and a dense cloud of smoke enveloped the band.

Two of the troopers fell wounded; and Lieutenant Barton then realized that his peaceful design to corral the Indians was impossible.

His men glanced at him expectantly, believing he would give the order to fire, but the command did not come just then.

Barton designed to get as close to them as possible, so that if it came to a running fight the savages would not have lead enough to escape destruction.

An army surgeon dropped out of the ranks and went back to the two fallen men.

Galloping ahead one hundred yards farther, the plucky lieutenant suddenly brandished his sword and yelled:

"Aim!"

The troopers were used to firing from the saddle.

They saw that the Indians were upon the point of pouring another volley into them, but it brought no fear to their hearts.

"Fire!"

As the lieutenant uttered this ringing command there came a roar from the carbines, and the smokeless powder left their field of vision entirely unobstructed.

Harry saw ten of the redskins fall, uttering defiant shouts, and he could only guess how many more were wounded.

The remainder were panic-stricken for a moment and dashed away in a body, the riderless mustangs going along with them, leaving their owners on the ground.

It would have been an easy matter then for the troopers to have poured a deadly fire into the backs of the flying Indians, and kill every one of them.

But Barton was too humane to order a massacre of that kind, and simply told his men to pursue them.

For a few minutes the race continued, the savages occasionally sending back a rifle or pistol shot, which were so badly aimed that they failed to do any injury.

"Black Bear was the first to lead the charge," commented Harry, "and now I see he is the first to lead the retreat."

"Injuns is cowards at heart in a case like this, pard," replied Dan. "They're mighty good blowers. But they can't stand up agin a charge of ther cavalry nohow."

Suddenly they saw Black Bear give his braves an order.

The whole band split and dashed away in all directions.

"A case of each man for himself," said Harry.

"Yes, yes; and it's a mighty wise move of ther cunning varmints. If we wants ter git at 'em we'll hev ter split up our party now."

And just then Lieutenant Barton gave the order to do just as Dan suggested, and most of the cavalrymen selected a brave to pursue and capture or kill.

"Dan," said Harry quickly, "there goes Black Bear. The honor of nabbing that foxy gent must be ours."

"Sure, boy, sure! Thar ain't no one headin' fer him yet, so thar can't be no disputin' our trackin' him down. In fact, I don't believe as any of ther

sojers knows as he's ther chief, as he ain't got no special head-dress."

Breaking away from the troop, Harry and Dan drove their horses off at break-neck speed in pursuit of the chief, who had gone straight ahead.

As every one else had gone off at an angle, Black Bear and his two relentless pursuers soon found themselves alone in an exciting race over the prairie.

The Indian was lying as flat as he could on his mustang's back, to escape any possible bullets that might come flying his way.

He now glanced back, and, seeing how the situation stood, he suddenly whirled his pony around, drew rein, raised his rifle and let a shot go at Dan's horse.

Struck square between the eyes by the bullet, the poor beast fell dead, throwing the scout to the ground.

"I'm out of it!" he roared at Harry, and then he began to swear.

"Shall I go after him alone?" called the boy.

"Yes, yes, if yer thinks as yer can down him."

"All right. I'll come back for you soon."

Dan made up his mind to try to catch one of the Indian's riderless mustangs, and started off with that object in view.

The chief had turned and ridden away.

Knowing what a keen, wily rascal he had to deal with, Harry dashed after him, holding his Winchester in readiness for use at an instant's notice.

On, on they raced at a tremendous pace, and Black Bear soon had the boy lured far from his friends.

Then he suddenly wheeled around again and fired.

There came a sudden sting on Harry's head where the ball struck, and then, to his horror, he felt his senses leaving him.

Up went his hands and over he toppled, striking the earth on his back, and all became a blank.

With a fiendish yell the Indian dashed toward him, brandishing his tomahawk.

CHAPTER XIII.

HOP SING THE CHINAMAN.

It Black Bear, dashing over the prairie on a mustang, with uplifted tomahawk, thought he was going to kill Harry, he was soon undeceived.

The Indian's bullet had grazed the tenderfoot's head and stunned him, but he was not slain by any means.

Quick to recover, the boy suddenly rose on his elbow, and, although he was still dazed, he quickly realized the danger threatening him.

Out came his revolver, just as the warrior arrived within a dozen yards of him, and then his training as a marksman came into play.

Scarcely sighting the weapon, Harry pulled the trigger.

Bang!

The savage flung up his arms.

With a wild death-cry pealing from his lips, he pitched backward and fell to the ground, while his pony dashed away at an angle.

By this time Harry recovered his faculties entirely.

Tying his handkerchief around the wound on his head, he picked up his hat, put it on, and coolly rose to his feet.

Casting a glance at the dead redskin, he muttered: "That's his finish. I wonder where Dan is?"

He soon saw the scout on an Indian pony he had captured riding toward him, waving his big sombrero.

In the far distance the remainder of the scattered band of Indians were being shot or captured by the pursuing troopers from Fort Shaw, and Lieutenant Barton and the surgeon were attending to those of the cavalymen whom the Indians had injured.

The afternoon was waning by this time.

"We'll never reach Choteau to register my claim if we keep on at this rate," mused the boy.

Just then Dan came dashing up to him.

"I see yer've dropped ther chief," he chuckled. "Bully fer you."

"Yes, I dropped him," admitted Harry, "but he nearly killed me."

"My, my! Is thet so? Wot did he do?"

Harry explained matters, and Dan gave a whistle of surprise and said:

"Well, well! Yer had a close call thet trip, pard."

"Too close to suit me," replied Harry. "There's a mustang a mile away browsing the grass. See if you can catch him for me."

The scout rode away, and with but little trouble got the broncho by the bridle and led him back to where the boy stood waiting.

He mounted and rode away beside Dan.

They returned to Lieutenant Barton and the surgeon, whom they found dressing the wounds of several troopers wounded by the Indians.

"I've killed Black Bear, sir, the chief of these redskins," said Harry.

"Ah," said the officer, glancing up at him. "Was it necessary?"

"Yes, sir; absolutely. I shot him in self-defence."

"Did he give you that wound on the head?"

"He did. It came near finishing me, too."

"Then he got what he deserved."

"Where are your men?"

"Scattered, in hot pursuit of the rest."

"It may be a long time before they return, then?"

"Very likely, Mr. Nevada."

"We will take our leave of you, lieutenant."

"All right, sir."

Harry and Dan shook hands with him and rode away.

(To be continued.)

TIMELY TOPICS

A contract was awarded on October 26 for the erection of a gun factory by the Bridgeport Projectile Company, of Bridgeport, Conn., which will be the third largest in the country. The plant, which is to be completed in ninety days, will be 300 feet long, 120 feet wide and two stories high. The company has just received an order for 146 five-inch guns for the Navy Department, and for 600,000 shells of various sizes from the War Department. The contract for the gun factory is to complete the navy work which must be finished in two years.

An American flag with pink stars and otherwise peculiarly "futuristic" in appearance hung from a pole in front of the United States Consulate in London, England, says a dispatch of October 31 to the New York World. A laundress hired to wash and iron the consulate's flags had boiled them, thus causing the colors to run. George Washington, who is Consul General Skinner's colored messenger and who saw service in the 10th Cavalry during the Spanish War, upbraided the laundress, who replied she had even thought of "putting starch in the flags. To this one flag that doesn't need any starch in it."

Pure musk is furnished by the moschus, or musk deer, found in Central Asia, and in the districts adjacent to the north of India and China. The receptacle which holds the musk in this animal is an oval or small glandular pouch, situated at the hinder part of the abdomen. The contents of this receptacle have a most powerful and penetrating odor, which, however agreeable at a distance, is highly unpleasant on near approach. When dry it is of a dark reddish-brown color, and has a bitter acid taste. It reaches Europe or America in its original purity.

The European war now is costing its participants \$105,000,000 every day, according to a brochure issued on November 1 by the Mechanics and Metals National Bank of New York City. Since 1914 the indebtedness of the seven principal nations engaged has been increased from \$27,000,000,000 to \$75,000,000,000. The most costly war previous to this was our Civil War, which ate up \$8,000,000,000. If the war should end in 1917, interest on the combined debt of the nations will amount to \$3,800,000,000 yearly. England is spending the most money, France next, Germany third and Russia least.

It has been estimated that the fertile lands of the globe amount to 28,000,000 square miles, the steppes to 14,000,000 and the deserts to 1,000,000. Fixing 207 persons to the square mile for fertile lands, 10 for steppes and 1 for deserts as the greatest population that the earth could properly nourish, the con-

clusion has been arrived at that when the number of inhabitants reaches about 6,000,000,000 our planet will be peopled to its full capacity. At present it contains a little more than one-quarter of that number. If the rate of increase shown by recent censuses should be uniformly maintained, it is thought that the globe would be fully peopled about the year 2072.

While hunting small game in the deer park of Rush Lake, Wis., Raymond Haengsen, a youth seventeen years of age, was severely gored by a seemingly tame deer. Haengsen was petting the deer when suddenly the animal jumped upon him, throwing him to the ground. In the attack the boy's face was cut and a long gash made in his leg below the knee by the horns of the deer. A friend who was near fired a charge of small shot from his shotgun, with the result that the rush of the animal was checked and the friend was able to drag his companion to safety.

Although 80,658 motor vehicles valued at \$100,-258,220 were shipped from the United States during the twelve months ending June 30, 1916, these were only one-fifteenth of all the motor vehicles produced in this country during the same period. There were shipped to foreign countries (not including American possessions) 21,265 commercial vehicles, valued at \$56,660,263. England, France and Russia took nearly all of the trucks (19,028) and nearly one-quarter of the passenger cars (13,848), or, in all, two-thirds of the total value of the exports. Great Britain and her colonies bought 43 per cent. and France and her colonies about 20 per cent. The Philippine Islands and the American possessions (Alaska, Hawaii and Porto Rico) received 4,488 motor vehicles, worth \$3,740,145.

The corner-stone of the Confederate monument that the United Daughters of the Confederacy are to erect upon the battlefield of Shiloh, at a cost of \$50,000, was laid on November 4, with Masonic ceremonies. The monument will stand near the old Shiloh meeting-house, in the angle made by the intersection of the Corinth-Pittsburgh Landing and Hamburg-Savannah roads. It will face in the direction from which the Confederate forces advanced to the attack in the early morning of April 6, 1862. The monument now under construction will be the most imposing in the park. In the center rises a bronze group, the subject of which is Victory Defeated by Death. Under the figures set in the granite is a bas-relief of Gen. Albert Sidney Johnston, the Confederate commander, killed there. The monument is the work of Frederick C. Hibbard, of Chicago.

WILD WEST WEEKLY

NEW YORK, DECEMBER 15, 1916.

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Good Current News Articles

There is exhibited in the National Museum at Washington a sapphire weighing nine karats, which contains a bubble that appears and disappears with changes of temperature. It is believed that a cavity in the gem incloses a quantity of carbonic acid gas under great pressure. When the temperature is such as to correspond with the "critical point" for that gas, under the particular pressure to which it is subjected in its brilliant prison house, it liquefies and becomes visible as a bubble.

Riverside, Cal., is to have a home for stray cats, sick dogs and any other domesticated animal in need of sustenance and protection. Mrs. C. M. Loring, of Minneapolis and of Riverside, has given \$3,000 for just such a home. She is interested in homeless animals and has wanted for some time to build a bungalow for their aid. The matter has been submitted to the City Council and a part of the acreage belonging to the city will be leased to the association organized to take over the beneficent fund. Hereafter stray cats will be welcomed in Riverside.

Treasury officials are considering whether the initials of the designer of the new dime, put in circulation recently, shall be eliminated and coinage suspended temporarily, as was done in the case of the original Lincoln one-cent piece. On the face of the dime the initials of the artist, A. Weinman, appear promptly in monogram. When the Lincoln cent piece was first coined it bore on the base of the bust small initials of the artist. While there is no law governing the question, the Treasury Department ordered the letters off, under its ruling that no advertising shall appear on any coin.

A recent paper by Mr. Charles Camsell, of the Geological Survey of Canada, corrects the common impression, prevalent even among Canadians, that comparatively little territory remains to be explored in Canada, apart from the Arctic islands. The im-

pression probably arises from the fact that the maps no longer show large tracts containing no detail, or marked "unexplored." The fact is, however, that an immense amount of material entering into the map of Canada is based upon vague and untrustworthy information. Mr. Camsell makes an estimate of the amount of unexplored continental territory in the Dominion, in which he follows the plan of considering as explored a strip of fifteen miles on each side of an explorer's route. On this basis the unexplored area amounts to about 901,000 square miles, and this does not take account of blocks under 4,000 square miles in extent. This is about 28 per cent. of the total area of Canada, excluding Arctic islands. A period of rapid progress in exploration will, however, probably follow the war, as recently constructed railways have greatly facilitated access to the unknown regions.

Grins and Chuckles

"Was it hard to choose a name for the baby?"
 "Not at all. He has only one wealthy uncle, you see."

Hyker—I wonder why Columbus imagined the world was round? Pyker—Because it didn't give him a square deal, I suppose."

She—I wouldn't marry you if you were the best man on earth! He—Of course not; it isn't the custom for the bride to marry the best man.

Gladys—I was so happy over Jack's letter I fairly hugged myself. May—Well, I was happier than you. Reggie called on me, and he did the hugging.

Teacher—Now, what is a fort? Johnny—A place for soldiers to live in. Teacher—And a fortress? Johnny—A place for soldiers' wives to live in.

The Doctor—My lad, do you know the best thing for a boy to take for a cold? Bobby (quickly)—Yes, sir; he should take a holiday from school.

"The only objection I have against the young man, my dear child, is that he has no noble ambition—no high or worthy object in life." "Oh, papa, how can you say so! He wants me."

Bess—I don't like that Mr. Cutting. Jess—That's unkind of you. I heard him say something awfully sweetly about you yesterday. Bess—Oh, did he? What was it? Jess—He said he imagined you must have been perfectly charming as a girl.

She—Pa says he will never consent to our marriage. He—Then we shall have to elope. She—There! I knew pa was wrong. He said you had no business ability, and yet the first thing you propose to do is to save him the expense of a stylish wedding.

THE ATTACK ON THE MOUNTAIN

By Paul Braddon

Some four years ago my brother and two sisters visited me in Florence. They spent two weeks with me, and then started for Venice, by the way of Bologna, where they had friends whom they were anxious to see.

I should have gone with them were I not engaged upon work which I had promised to have done within a given time; but as it was, we made the thing work very well, for my brother expected two thousand pounds by the hands of a friend who was shortly expected from Rome, and it was arranged that I should take the money when it came and bring it with me to Venice when I got ready to meet them there.

My brother left the necessary document for the obtaining of the money, and in due time set out.

The friend arrived from Rome with the money.

He delivered it into my hands upon the production of my brother's written instructions, and I decided on the next Monday as the day on which I would start.

I was not really fit to undertake such a journey, but I could not miss seeing my sisters once more before they returned home.

I could have sent the money easily enough, but I had promised myself too much pleasure with my relatives in Venice to miss it now.

Upon reaching Pistoja I learned that there was no diligence to leave before the next day.

I could not stand this.

I was already behind my time, and, if the thing could be accomplished, I must go on.

There was a diligence under the shed, but no one to drive it.

"But can't we hire some one?" I asked.

"If signor will pay," was the laconic reply.

Of course I would pay; and though the sum charged was a round one, yet I did not hesitate.

The lumbering vehicle was dragged out; four miserable-looking horses were attached, and then a yoke of stout oxen attached on ahead of them.

Two rough-looking fellows were provided, one as a postilion and the other to drive the oxen.

Thus provided, I took my seat, and the diligence started.

We were to cross the Apennines by the Pass of La Collina, and had just begun to ascend the rugged mountain path when I heard a loud halloaing, and in a moment the diligence stopped.

"What's the matter?" I asked, poking my head out through the opening by my side.

"Two men want to ride," returned the vetturino.

"But I have hired the diligence and am in a hurry; to drive on. If they wish to ride they must wait until to-morrow."

But the drivers were not to be governed thus.

"It won't make a bit of difference," they said.

"We'll go just as fast, and besides, they'll pay us something."

By this time the cause of all the trouble made its appearance in the shape of two dark-visaged, black-bearded, powerful men.

I recognized one of them as a fellow whom I had seen hanging around the hotel at Florence, and the other I was confident I had caught a glimpse of just as the diligence left the yard at Pistoja.

I was upon the point of speaking when the thought occurred to me that I had better keep my knowledge of the Italian language to myself.

I might find out the character of the fellows thus.

I knew very well that further remonstrances would be useless, for the drivers were stupidly hog-gish, and the new applicants were surely not men to be argued with.

The door was open and the fellows entered.

I occupied the back seat, and they took the seat at the other end, fixing themselves so as to face me.

They looked at me out of wicked eyes, and as they threw back their short cloaks I saw that they were well armed.

"Hope we don't trouble you," said one of them in coarse Italian, as the diligence started on.

I gazed inquiringly into his face, but made no reply.

He repeated his remark.

"No comprehend, signor," I said, shaking my head.

"Ah, English," he suggested, with a shrug of his shoulders.

We had now begun to ascend the mountain in good earnest, and our pace was slow and lumbering.

The fellow who drove the oxen made noise enough for an army, while the blows upon both oxen and horses fell hard and thick, but without accomplishing anything.

Had I been alone I might have enjoyed the beautiful scenery which unfolded itself below us as we crept up the Collina; but as it was I could not think of anything save the two men who had forced themselves upon me.

Pretty soon one of them spoke, and, though I appeared not to notice them, yet I could see that they were watching me closely.

"Death and destruction!" he uttered in his own tongue, "we shall be over the precipice if that drunken driver is not careful."

I read the fellow's purpose in a moment, and not a movement betrayed my understanding of what he had said.

My eyes were half closed and to all appearances I was unconscious even of their presence.

"He's right. He don't understand us," said one of them.

"All's safe," returned the other.

After this they conversed together quite freely, and I was not long in having my worst fears realized.

But not a change could they detect in my countenance.

I kept my knowledge as secret as the very grave, and all my feeling was within me.

After a while they became satisfied that I knew nothing of their language, and they became more bold in their speech, and talked their plan all over; and from them I learned the following:

The one I had seen in Florence had by some means learned that I was to carry a large sum of money with me across the mountains, and he had come to Pistoja, where his confederate was to await my arrival, intending to rob me there, if possible.

But when they found that I was to be alone in the diligence they had a better plan—they would rob me on the mountain.

The two drivers were friends of theirs, and were to be paid liberally for allowing themselves to be overcome.

The villains talked about shooting me through the head; or plunging a knife to my heart, and then throwing me over the precipice, as coolly as though they had been planning the death of a fowl for dinner.

The place where they were going to kill me was about a mile distant—where the road wound around a high crag, with an almost perpendicular wall of rock upon one hand and a deep chasm upon the other.

This was an interesting position, sure enough, and the only weapon I had was a single pistol.

Either of the men could have thrown me over his head with ease; and as for fighting with them, that was out of the question.

Both the drivers were in league with them.

If I leaped from the diligence I should die on the spot where I landed.

If I shot one of them the other would annihilate me in a moment.

I had the gold in a small traveling bag under my feet, and as the heavy carriage jounced over the stones the yellow pieces jingled sharply, and I could see the eyes of the villains sparkle like stars.

At length the high, craggy peak was in sight, and I could see where the road wound abruptly about it.

Thus far I had been torturing my brain to invent some way of escape, but without effect.

I was as thoroughly hedged in as though bound by iron chains, and in a few moments all would be over.

Still, I felt for my pistol and had it ready.

Presently the diligence stopped at the foot of an abrupt rise, and the fellow who drove the oxen came and told the men they must get out and walk.

They stepped out at once and in a moment more I heard a slight scuffle.

I looked out just in time to see both drivers lashed together by the arms, back to back.

They must have been already placed for the operation, for the thing had been done with incredible quickness.

In a few seconds one of the villains came and poked the muzzle of a huge pistol into my face.

"Gold, gold!" he said. "Give me gold or die!"

It was but the work of a second to knock his

weapon down with my left hand, while with my right I brought up my own pistol and fired.

The ball entered between his eyes, and he reeled back and fell.

Then I leaped after him, for I saw his companion coming up upon the other side.

I hoped to gain the dead man's pistol, but ere I could do so the heavy hand of his companion was upon my shoulder, and his pistol aimed at my head.

With the energy which the presence of death can alone beget, I knocked his weapon down and grappled with him.

He hurled me to the ground, but before he could follow up his advantage the postilion cried out:

"Hold, Marco! A vettura is coming!"

The man turned, and in a moment more a heavy vettura, with four horses attached, came around the bluff, full upon us.

I started to my feet and saw my brother looking from the open window.

"Help!" I shouted with all my might.

The fellow had taken aim at the vetturino of the new team, but he was too late.

My brother had comprehended the whole truth in a moment, and with a sure aim, and a quick one, too, he shot the villain through the heart.

We secured my two drivers, and then matters were quickly explained.

One of my sisters had been sick at Bologna, so they had not yet gone to Venice, but were waiting until I should be able to join them.

We tumbled the two dead bodies into the diligence, and the two drivers, bound hand and foot, were tumbled after them.

The drive down the mountain was quickly performed, and the city of Pistoja was reached without mishap.

The two dead men were recognized as old offenders at once, and my testimony very quickly settled the business of the drivers.

On the next night we were in Bologna, where my sister received me with open arms, and two days afterwards we were all in Venice.

At the outbreak of the European war Lord Roberts of the British army organized a movement to supply the army in the field with field glasses and telescopes, realizing there would be a natural shortage of these aids. The carrying out of the scheme was undertaken by the National Service League, of which Lord Roberts was president, a special branch of the league being formed for the purpose, called the field glass fund. A letter from Aileen Roberts, daughter of Lord Roberts, in the *Labore* (India) Civil and Military Gazette states that 25,000 field glasses have been received by the league for distribution and she adds: "It was my father's wish that, when possible, the glasses should be returned to their owners at the end of the war, and every glass has been registered and numbered."

FROM ALL POINTS

There is a lot of money in Kansas—enough to buy the minister a motor car merely by passing the hat in a crowd. So comes the report from Harlan, Kan., where fancy-priced hogs, cattle, wheat and corn are the means of sustenance for farmers. The other day, says J. W. Patlee, of this town, a \$5,000 church was being dedicated and the finance committee announced the fund to put the church out of debt lacked \$1,500. "Pass the hat," yelled some one. The hat contained \$2,029 in cash and checks when it got back.

A recent publication of the Interior Department entitled "Excavation and Repair of Sun Temple, Mesa Verde National Park," by J. Walter Fewkes, describes the most interesting prehistoric building yet found in a region where so many important archaeological discoveries have been made. The building is of an unfamiliar type and is believed to have been used for religious purposes. From the annual rings of a juniper tree growing on a mound of debris and other evidences the date of construction is roughly estimated at 1,500 A. D.

How the great war across the seas could make the price of wolf and coyote skins go soaring, no one here seems to know. It is a fact, nevertheless, that pelts of these animals are now selling for more than an average sheep will bring, and every quotation shows a rise in their market value. The price of a coyote pelt has increased during the last few months from \$1 to \$8. Wolf skins of the lobo species sell for even higher prices. It is such a profitable business professional trappers are flocking into Texas in great numbers.

Elkhead, a Sioux Indian with the ideas of some white men as to securing revenues, got out his plow and plowed up a road north of Eagle Butte, S. D., where it climbed over quite a hill. The Sioux claimed he did it to keep his wagon from crowding the horses while he was hauling hay down the hill, but at the same time he happened to be near with his team when autos ran into the freshly ploughed trail and could not make the grade. The Indian's team would be supplied for \$1 and aid in getting the stalled car out of the ploughed ground and to the top of the hill.

For the first time, so it is claimed, motion pictures were recently applied as an aid to the most difficult operations in surgery. The occasion was when Dr. S. William Schapira, member of the Academy of Medicine, lectured at Fordham University on various genito-urinary operations, illustrating his lec-

ture with motion pictures of actual operations performed by him. These pictures, which possess an extraordinary scientific value, cover thirteen distinct operations, and were made by a Pathe cameraman under Dr. Schapira's direction. In the past surgical lectures have been illustrated by "still" pictures or drawings, and much of the detail has been lost. In the present motion pictures every movement is clearly shown, and it is perhaps not too much to say that a new era has dawned in the teaching of surgery.

The National Security League, which is conducting a nation-wide campaign of education in favor of universal military training and service, recently requested some of the newspapers throughout the United States to test the sentiment of their respective communities on this question by publishing a ballot which sought the opinion of newspaper readers as to whether they are in favor of universal military training wholly under federal control. The returns thus far received indicate a wider sentiment in favor of military training than the advocates of the system had hoped for. As the result of the publication of the ballot in the Pittsburg Dispatch the percentage in favor of military training was 74 per cent. In Boise City, Idaho, the ballots showed an affirmative percentage of 82.9 per cent. In Salt Lake City, Utah, the percentage was 86 per cent., and Sacramento reported 81 per cent. in favor.

Among the latest articles which ingenious minds are always devising for the benefit of the fisherman is the hydroscope. There are very few anglers, probably, who, as they have waited, with more or less patience for the fish to bite, have not longed to get a peep into the water, just to see if there were any fish about or not. Bass especially congregate in certain localities where the food supply is good and there are rocks to play around, and as a rule remain there all day long. It is an immense convenience, therefore, for the bass fishermen to be able to look down into the water and survey the prospect. A simple means of surveying the bottom of the water has been successfully tried. A pail with the bottom knocked out, or a narrow box, open at both ends or furnished with a stout pane of glass at the end in the water, has been found to answer fairly well, says the Philadelphia Inquirer. Those who use the box or pail get a good deal of fun out of it and learn unsuspected things sometimes, as when an angler saw a big bass deliberately drive away smaller fish from, and stand guard over, his carefully baited hook. Whether it was solicitude for the bass' young companion or an ordinary case of dog-in-the-manger he could not make out.

ARTICLES OF ALL KINDS

CAT A GOOD HUNTER.

S. S. Hart, of Carey, Ohio, has a twelve-pound black cat that cares nothing for game laws. It hid itself to the woods recently and returned with a big rabbit, carefully carrying it by the scuff of the neck and in no wise injuring the meat. The cat made a second trip and brought home a mud hen.

ROBBERS LOOT A BANK.

Two robbers overpowered and bound the watchman at the Merchants Bank of Canada, at Okotoks, thirty miles west of Calgary, early the other day, blew the safe and escaped in an automobile with \$7,000. The robbers cut all wires leading into the town, and it was several hours before word of the robbery reached Calgary and a posse was sent in pursuit.

STARTING A FOX FARM.

The first fox farm as a business enterprise in Eastern Oregon is being started by P. A. Snyder, of John Day. He has secured a special permit to launch the enterprise near Dixie Mountain, northeast of Prairie City. He is now erecting buildings and fences and will start with three pairs of genuine black foxes from Prince Edward Island, which he purchased for \$600 a pair.

BOY KILLED IN HUNTING.

Charles Scalmazzo, fifteen years, was instantly killed recently when hunting with two other boys near the Isolation Hospital, outside Paterson, N. J.

Louis Schaffel, seventeen years, of No. 161 Al-bion avenue, that city, had fired at a chipmunk. The animal hid in a stone wall. While Schaffel reloaded both barrels Scalmazzo began tearing down the stones. As the gun was reloaded the chipmunk jumped out. Scalmazzo straightened up and his head hit the gun. It went off. Both barrels hit him in the head.

RATS WERE THIEVES.

Supposing that sneak thieves had been stealing from her home for the past few years, and, in her mind, accusing small boys of the mischief, Mrs. Bessie Hudson, of Georgetown, Del., was shocked to regain the lost articles when workmen, in making repairs to the kitchen floor, found them strewn in different places under the boards, where rats had dragged them.

For the past two years Mrs. Hudson had been missing various articles, including three silver spoons, a silver dinner bell, a comb case and other small articles. She supposed that children were systematically stealing from her home and set various traps, but never caught them.

CHILD ESCAPES COYOTE.

Attracted to the dooryard by an unusual noise being made by her flock of turkeys, Mrs. Thomas Merchant, living east of Bend, Ore., found a coyote running toward her little girl, who was playing in the yard. The animal was frothing at the mouth and is believed to have been rabid. Mrs. Merchant had just time to snatch her daughter up and return to the house before the coyote reached the spot where the little girl was at play.

The coyote afterward attacked a dog near by and was fighting with it when a neighbor, summoned by telephone, arrived and killed it.

GERMAN PRODUCTION OF OIL FROM FRUIT STONES.

To increase the supply of oil and fat, poppy and sunflower seeds have been even more widely sown in Germany this year than last. In 1915 about 662,250 pounds of oil were obtained from sunflower seeds, and this year promises a rich crop of poppy seed. Attention has also been drawn to the high percentage of oil contained in cherry and plum stones, which are usually thrown away. According to the statistics of 1900 there were 22,000,000 cherry and 70,000,000 plum trees in Germany. Large quantities of fruit stones were collected by school children last year, but great quantities were thrown away or destroyed owing to the difficulty of extracting the oil from them.

BODY ARMOR IN TRENCHES.

In many instances the evolution of modern military uniforms and arms has been marked by a return to types of ancient and mediaeval days. Perhaps the steel helmet is the most striking example of this tendency. Now a London firm has patented and is manufacturing an officer's steel-lined jacket which suggests the old coats of mail, though in outward appearance it resembles an ordinary close-fitting coat. It is claimed that the jacket will resist a 45-calibre revolver bullet at twenty yards.

POPULATION OF CANAL ZONE.

The population of the Canal Zone, as shown in a house-to-house canvass made by the police and fire departments, is 31,048, of which number 14,876 are from the United States. The total includes all the employes of the Panama Canal, members of the military organization and women and children residing in the Zone. The soldiers in the Zone number 7,451 men, and the civilians employed on the canal 11,742, of whom 3,598 are from the United States and 7,144 from other countries. The number of women in the Zone is 5,321, of whom 1,886 are from the United States.

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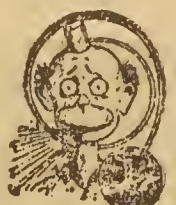
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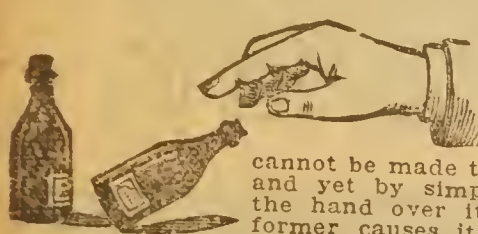
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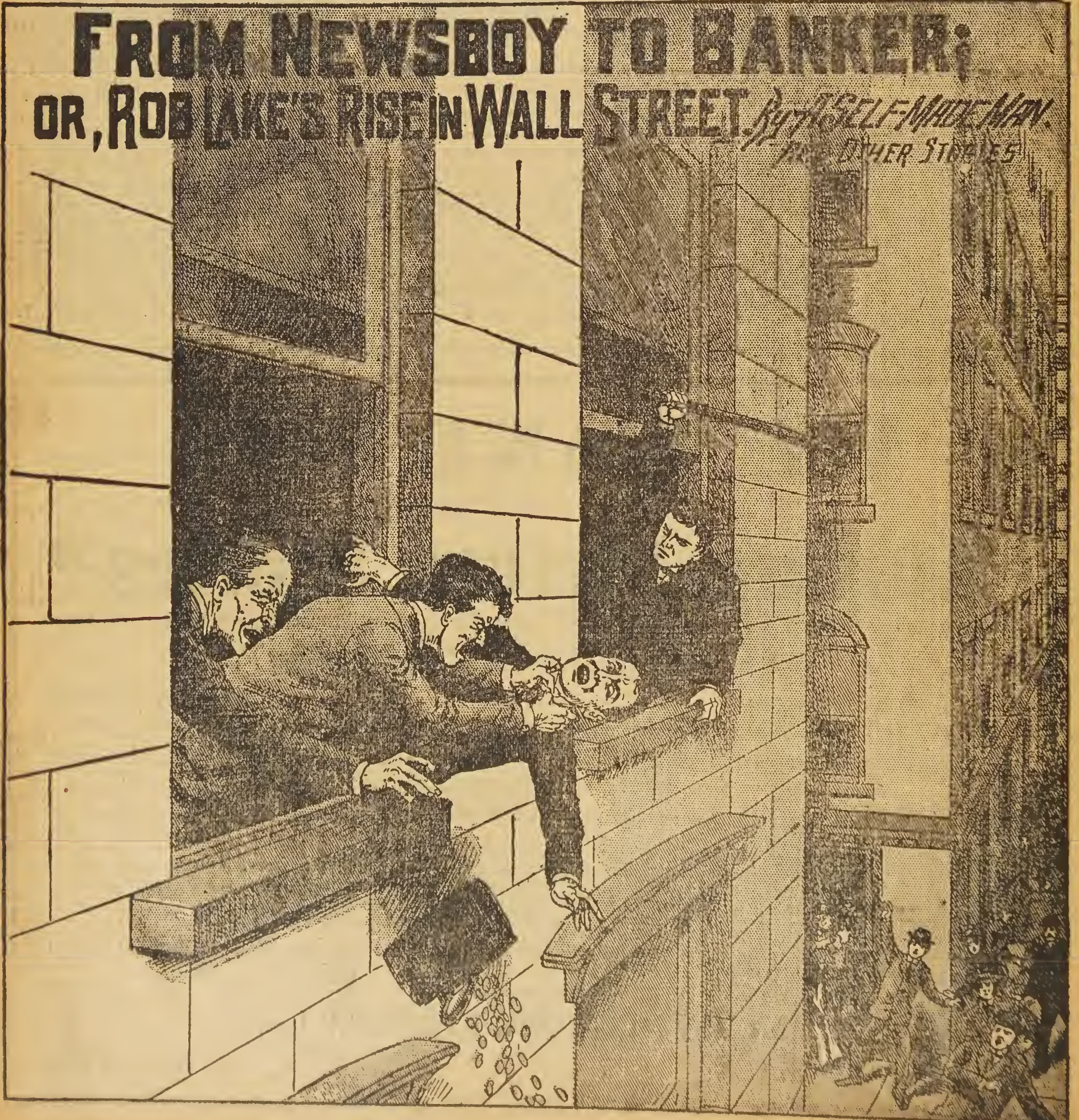
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